

THRILLING STORIES

OF SCHOOL LIFE AND
BRAVE ADVENTURE FOR

GIRLS



METHODIST
SUNDAY SCHOOL

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THRILLING STORIES
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FOR GIRLS

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THE NEW GIRL IN THE FIFTH

By Editha Manners.

CHAPTER I

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE TRAIN

VIOLET CHARTERIS ran her eye sharply over the array of compartments as the train slowed into the station, and quickly espied a 'Ladies Only.' She was the only schoolgirl on the platform, for the station was a small country one, and she was catching the connection to Bolsover, on the opening day of the autumn term at Bolsover Girls' Public School, whither she was going for the first time.

Suitcase and umbrella in hand, she at once skipped up to that Second Class 'Ladies Only,' opened the door, and sprang in. She had no luggage to bother about, her trunk having been sent on in advance.

The compartment had two other occupants—a tall, well-dressed girl of about her own age, and evidently also a schoolgirl going back after the holidays, and a rather prim, sedate-looking young lady of twenty-two or twenty-four years of age, wearing tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles. The pair faced each other in the near corner seats, and so Violet crossed to the

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far side of the compartment and placed her suitcase and umbrella in the corner of the rack there, on the same side as the strange schoolgirl.

Almost immediately the guard's whistle blew, and the train began to move out of the station. Settling herself comfortably in her corner, Vi glanced again and this time more closely at her two travelling companions. She saw that the prim, bespectacled young lady had closed her eyes and was either just doing so to rest them, or was dozing. The strange schoolgirl was reading a book, and appeared to be absorbed in it. She had barely lifted her eyes from it on Vi's entry.

Vi Charteris took quiet stock of her, and wondered whether she was also going to Bolsover School.

'It is more than likely that she is,' Vi reflected. 'How pretty she is, with her bobbed auburn hair! She's about my age—sixteen—so she ought to be in the Fifth Form also. If she raises her eyes from her book and looks at me, I'll ask her whether she is going to Bolsover School. I should like her for a chum, if we are in the same Form.'

But the strange schoolgirl, with the bobbed auburn hair—Vi's hair was also bobbed, but what she herself called mouse-coloured—kept her eyes riveted upon her book while the train sped on. She turned over a page in a breathless, excited way, and went on reading, utterly unconscious apparently of the shy, eager, and even wistful glances that Violet kept casting at her.

The train was approaching the next station when she happened to look up from her book and gaze meditatively—introspectively—at the bespectacled young lady opposite her. Vi Charteris, promptly glancing at her again, was about to cough to attract

her attention, as a preliminary to starting a conversation, when Vi was amazed to see an expression of almost stony horror leap into her eyes.

The strange girl's whole face at the same time changed as if by magic from its look of smiling introspection to one of acute consternation. She stared wide-eyed and open-mouthed at the dozing young lady before her, as though the latter had suddenly developed two heads or had a countenance like the fabled Medusa, whose face was so awful as to convert to stone everybody who beheld it.

Amazed and even startled by this sudden change in the other girl's looks, Vi Charteris turned her gaze quickly and inquiringly upon the young lady, to discover what could have caused it. But from where she sat, Vi could detect nothing unusual or out of the ordinary in the lady's appearance, although she studied this closely for a moment or two.

The train began to slacken speed. It was running alongside another station platform.

With her eyes still fixed in a horrified, fascinated way upon the dozing young lady's placid face, the strange schoolgirl rose upright with every symptom of stealth and caution, as though fearful of arousing the lady. Gently reaching forward one hand, while she steadied herself against the doorway with the other, she took a suitcase from the rack immediately over the unconscious lady's head.

Then, in the same stealthy, 'don't-wake-the-baby' sort of way, she took an umbrella from her own corner, and, tucking it under one arm, softly pushed back the catch of the door beside her. As the door opened, she seized and held it to prevent it swinging wide and possibly making a noise. Then out she stepped hastily on to the footboard, although the

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train had not yet pulled up and was still going pretty fast.

Completely puzzled by her odd behaviour, and suddenly thinking that for all her superior and schoolgirl appearance she might be an artful thief making off with the dozing young lady's suitcase—Vi was the more justified in her momentary suspicion, seeing that the suitcase had been over the lady's head, adjoining another case and an umbrella—Miss Charteris made a quick move towards the open door, to detain her.

But in the same instant the train stopped, and the strange girl leaped athletically off the footboard in the direction of the engine, and raced away. Half thrown off her feet by the jerk the train gave in pulling up, Violet rushed to the open door and looked along the platform after her—in time to see her nearly collide with two other girls of the same age, who were rushing from compartment to compartment as if looking for someone. They also carried suitcases and umbrellas.

‘Ha! here you are, Gladys!’ one of the pair cried. ‘But why did you get out, and bring your suitcase with you? Was your compartment too full?’

‘Don't ask me any questions. Let's hop in here.’ And, to Violet Charteris's further bewilderment, the girl called Gladys leaped in at the open door of a compartment beside them. The two other girls exchanged surprised and somewhat startled glances before following her within.

Utterly unable yet to account for Gladys's behaviour, but satisfied that she could hardly be a thief in the circumstances, Vi Charteris sank into the corner seat the said Gladys had just vacated, and looked again at the anything but Medusa-like young

lady dozing opposite. The train was on the move once more.

Something like a large drop of dirty, yellow-coloured water flashed past Vi's vision and alighted with a faint 'plop' upon the window-side of the young lady's blue felt cloche hat.

And then our schoolgirl saw that a thickish, yellow-coloured viscid substance like soup was smeared all over the same side of the hat!

Even as she looked, another large drop of the glutinous yellow fluid dropped upon the hat from the rack above.

Vi's dilating eyes sought the rack in explanation.

A bottle or small glass jar, wrapped in thin tissue paper, lay upon its side on the rack, and, by turning her head slightly on one side, Vi read on the bottle where the wrapping had come away the tell-tale word 'Piccalilli.'

Gladys's behaviour was no longer a mystery. Vi Charteris comprehended everything; and, as she did so, the whole thing so tickled her that she could not suppress her mirth. She burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter, rocking helplessly in her seat, with her handkerchief crammed ineffectually over her mouth.

The young lady opposite opened her eyes at once on the outburst, stared surprisedly, and drew herself more erect. Consequently, the next drip from the leaking bottle of piccalilli on the rack missed her hat and fell splashing upon her cheek.

She started as if she had been stung, clapped a gloved hand quickly to the smitten cheek, and stroked it amazedly, then looked with still greater amazement at the yellow-stained finger-tips of her glove.

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This was too much for Vi Charteris, who went off into another irresponsible fit of laughter.

The young lady glared annihilatingly through her spectacles, but whipped aside in time to escape the next grip, which fell upon the seat between her and the window, and looked up at the rack. Jumping to her feet, she took the jar off the rack—rather gingerly, it must be said, for fear of staining her glove still worse than it was already—and, reading the label, turned on Vi in angry indignation.

‘How dare you put this leaking jar of pickles over my head?’ she demanded in awful tones. ‘You are liable for any damage you may have caused my hat or clothes. Take it at once and put it under the seat, please. You took care, apparently, not to put it over your own head.’

Vi controlled her risibility as best she could.

‘But—but, please, the bottle isn’t mine,’ she managed to get out, ‘and—and I didn’t put it there.’

The young lady glared again at her, as if doubting her statements, then, putting the bottle on the floor of the compartment beside them, said icily:

‘If it is not yours, then whose is it, pray? It certainly is not mine.’

‘It must belong to somebody else who was in the carriage,’ Vi returned, having no desire expressly to betray the runaway Gladys.

‘Ah! there was another girl in the carriage when I dozed off. Did she get out at the last station?’

‘Yes, madam.’

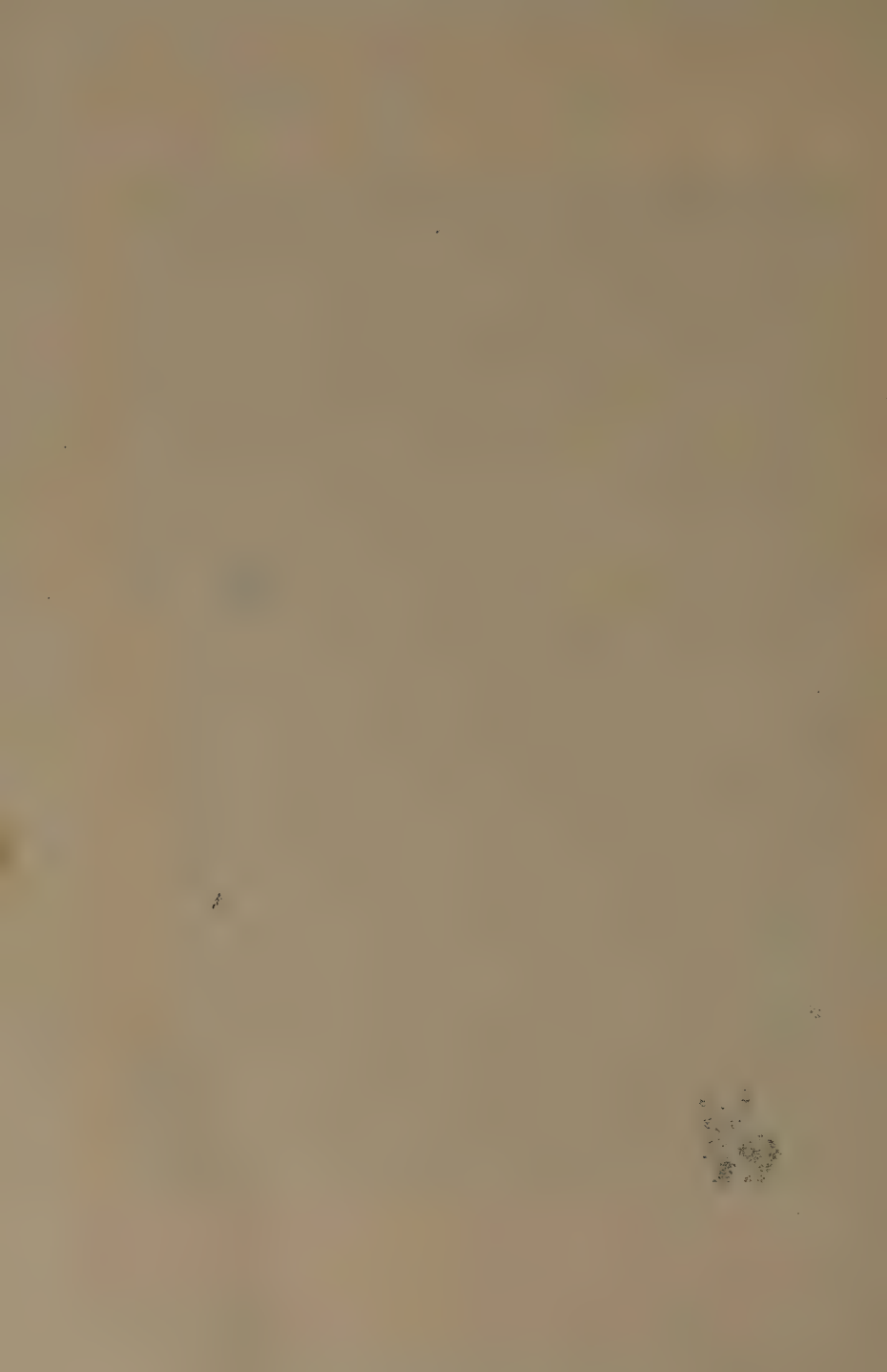
‘I thought that she was going on to Bolsover—to the girls’ school there. Are you?’

‘Yes, madam.’

‘So am I. I am the new Fifth Form-mistress there.’



‘The young lady whipped aside to escape the next drip.’



CHAPTER II

THE FIRST MONTH AT BOLSOVER

VI gasped in fresh horror, and wondered vaguely and alarmedly whether the runaway Gladys would consider that she (Vi) had 'given her away' if the Form-mistress made any to-do about the matter.

The self-avowed Form-mistress wiped the piccalilli from her glove finger-tips with her handkerchief, then scrubbed her cheek, and, opening her handbag, surveyed herself in the little mirror within it. Thus discovering the injury done to her hat, she pursed her lips tightly and took it off.

It would have done no good to wipe the 'juice' off the hat; this would be badly stained, if not irretrievably done for, in any case, and she would only make her handkerchief still wetter, stickier, and more discoloured. So, with a slight frown, but choking down the angry words that probably rose to her lips, she stood up again, took down her suitcase from the rack, and, opening it, sought and found another soft felt hat, which she put on in place of the damaged one.

'Most provoking!' she said, half to herself and half to Vi. 'My blue hat will need to be dyed, if I ever hope to wear it again. I don't think I ever shall, for that piccalilli is bound to leave a most unsightly stain, which may show through any dye. I can well understand now why that girl left the compartment at the last station so quietly as not to disturb me.'

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And then she herself saw the funny side of the incident, and burst into a merry peal of laughter, in which Vi was not slow in joining.

‘Well, well, the mischief is done, and it is always better to laugh than cry over the mischances that befall us. After all, it was an accident, and, though I am the sufferer, I can forgive the culprit for the merry laugh she has just given me. I expect she will be in my class, if she is going to the school, as I’m inclined to think, for she was about the age. And you, also, I imagine, will be in the Fifth Form, my dear. Yet stay, you did not appear to know each other.’

‘I am to be in the Fifth Form, madam, but I am a new girl; this will be my first term at Bolsover, and so I do not know any of the other girls yet.’

‘Ah, that accounts for it! Well, I am pleased to make the acquaintance of one of my pupils. What is your name, my dear? Mine is Miss Cluny.’

Violet told Miss Cluny her name; and during the remainder of the train journey to Bolsover Station the pair became on the most friendly terms, talking about their previous schools. Several other girls, evidently bound for the same destination, got into the compartment at intermediate stations, but as they were all just as evidently juniors—girls of only twelve or thirteen years of age—Miss Cluny did not introduce herself to them; nor did Vi, of course, needless perhaps to add.

Violet told herself delightedly that her Form-mistress was a true sport, to take the ruin of her hat and the whole misadventure so good-temperedly.

‘I’m glad for Gladys’s sake, too,’ she reflected. ‘I must make it my business as soon as I see Gladys again to tell her she need not be alarmed any further

over the piccalilli episode. I hope that she will be in my Form. I liked the look of her, and hope that this merry business will lead to our becoming great chums.'

She was roused from her reverie by the train entering Bolsover station and all the other occupants jumping up to collect their belongings.

'I ordered a taxi to be in waiting for me,' said Miss Cluny. 'You may accompany me in it, if you like, Violet. I presume you will prefer coming with me, as you do not know any of the other girls yet. We will leave the jar of pickles behind, as it leaks. Its owner must suffer its loss in the circumstances.'

And so it was that Vi Charteris drove up in state to her new school. Miss Cluny took her to Miss Watson, the Head Mistress, whom she had met a week before when her mother brought her to the school to arrange for her education. The Head received her kindly, and handed her over to the care of a maid, who escorted her to the Fifth Form dormitory and showed her her cubicle, then left her.

Her box had arrived, and she was setting out her things, when half a dozen girls came trooping into the dormitory. She peered out of her cubicle, and saw that their leader was the heroine of the piccalilli incident.

Gladys caught sight of her, and at once came towards her, saying:

'You are a new girl in the Fifth. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Gladys Colvin, your Form prefect. I have been promoted to the Sixth, skipping the Fifth, though I didn't want to a bit. I'd sooner have stayed among all my old classmates and been only in the Fifth, as I've just been saying.'

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Then she stepped inside the cubicle, and beckoned Violet to accompany her to its farther end.

'I want to say something to you in private,' she whispered. 'What is your name?'

Vi told her.

'You are the girl who was in the railway compartment I so abruptly fled from. You know the reason of my flight?' She kept a straight face, and so Violet did the same, and simply nodded. 'I want you not to breathe a word about that incident in the train; not that I am afraid of getting into any trouble over it. Miss Cluny met me just now. I apologized, and we are the best of pals. She took it in true sport fashion.'

'She told me that she forgave you, on account of the merry laugh you had given her.'

'She's a sport all out, as I said. You haven't told any one about the incident, have you?'

'No, I haven't spoken to a soul here yet, except yourself, and of course Miss Cluny herself, Miss Watson, and the maid who brought me in here.'

'That's all right, then, and, as I said, I don't want you to tell anybody. I know you didn't give me away to Miss Cluny. She told me you didn't—that she knew I was the culprit from my flight so surreptitiously.'

This time she could not altogether suppress a grin at the recollection, and Vi indulged in a faint titter.

'Why I don't want you to say anything about it is because, of course, if you did it would be all over the school in no time, and I want to consider Miss Cluny's feelings. She doesn't want it known; she asked me not to say anything about it and to see you at once and get you also to promise not to. For my own part, too, I don't want it known. You see, I

have been made a prefect, as I told you, and so have now a certain dignity to keep up. And my old chums, your fellow-Fifths, would pull my leg—chip me unmercifully about it. I'll have a job as it is, I fear, to maintain discipline over them.'

'I give you my solemn promise not to tell it to a soul,' Vi responded, in the same low, cautious tones the other was using. 'I quite understand how both you and Miss Cluny feel in the matter, and you may rely on my absolute silence.'

'I am sure I may, and I'm sure also we'll be the best of friends. Look here, I'll drop in and see you in your study later and make your better acquaintance. Every Fifth Form girl, like every Sixth Former, you may not know, has a study to herself here at Bolsover. Come now, and I'll introduce you to such of your fellow-Fifths as are here—my old classmates.'

The five other Fifths in the dormitory, taking their cue from their new prefect, who had been the most popular girl in the Upper Fourth, received Vi affably, and speedily put her quite at her ease amongst them. Two of them, Mabel Rogers and Doreen Loftus—the same two girls whom Gladys Colvin had nearly collided with on fleeing from Vi's compartment in the train—took her under their wing, and, when they had put all their things to rights in their cubicles, carried her off to the common-room, where she was introduced to others of her Form.

Gladys kept her promise by paying Violet a flying visit during prep. that same evening. The Sixth Former could not stay very long, and so left the study door open—slightly ajar. Naturally, almost the first thing they spoke about was the episode in

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the train, and they both laughed consumedly over it. Gladys, of course, wanted to know how Miss Cluny acted on discovering the pickle juice dripping upon her hat.

One of Violet's fellow-Fifths chanced to be passing the door at the time, and, hearing the subdued merriment within stopped and peeped in through the crack, then did what no self-respecting young lady would do—played the eavesdropper.

From what the two in the study said to each other the girl listening outside learned everything that had transpired, as regarded the leaking jar of piccalilli, and went off on tiptoe to her own study, hugging herself with glee over the secret knowledge.

It was some days later, and the school had settled down into its usual routine, when Gladys Colvin came up to Vi Charteris, Mabel Rogers, Doreen Loftus, and some other Fifth Formers, hailing them all thus:

‘Say, you Fifths, Bella Hodges, our esteemed new head girl, has taken over the editorship of the *Bolsoverian*, the school magazine, and she wants contributions in the shape of short stories, articles, essays, and poems. She asked me to ask you Fifths to write something for her. So now there's a chance for any of you who consider yourselves budding literary geniuses.’

‘I should dearly like to contribute something,’ said Vi. ‘It must be quite exciting to see one's self in print.’

‘Then by all means send Bella something. She'll be glad to consider anything, though of course I can't promise she'll accept anything. Write of some merry adventure, or a visit to some old castle, or where you went in the hols.’ And Gladys went off.

Two of the subjects taught in the three upper Forms at Bolsover were shorthand and typewriting, and every member of the Fifth and Sixth Forms had a typewriter in her study for her own use. She was supposed to use it for essays, historical or geographical themes, science subjects, &c.

Vi Charteris had not been taught typewriting at her previous school, but from the first moment that she discovered that she had a typewriter in her study she had set herself to learn how to use it, and she was already becoming fairly proficient with it. Shorthand, however, she did not know or learn; she took another subject in its stead.

During the next couple of weeks she dashed off two short articles for the school magazine, being most anxious to see herself in print, as she had said. One of the articles she sent in was an account of a visit she had made to Paris during the summer holidays, and the other was a somewhat humorous description of a cricket match at her late school—St. Agatha's. She hammered them both out on her typewriter, which had sustained a slight accident before it came into her possession, the top of the small letter 'd' being chipped off, so that all her 'd's' looked like italicized 'a's' thus 'a,' and she had to ink in the top.

As there was no other machine available, she had to be content with this damaged one.

A day or two later, as she was on her way to the Fifth's tennis court, she ran up against Bella Hodges, the head girl and editress of the *Bolsoverian*. Bella stopped her and said:

'I've accepted your three contributions to the magazine, Violet Charteris, and I hope you'll be a regular contributor. Most of the seniors are too lazy

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or too self-conscious of their own literary deficiencies to write for it. It will be out on the first of next month.'

'I shall be only too pleased to write regularly for you, Bella,' Vi replied, delighted beyond measure.

'Glad to hear it, dear! Send me in two or three contributions every month; the earlier the better, of course. I'm sure they will all be up to publication standard; and I would sooner use several contributions by the same writer than have a lot of indifferent stuff by two or three authors. Write one MS. under your own name, and the others under pen-names. See they are up to snuff, that's all!'

'Thank you very much, Bella! And I shall let you have them early in the month, never fear.'

And off Vi raced to spread the news joyfully among her class-mates that two of her contributions would appear in the next issue of the *Bolsoverian*.

Needless, perhaps, to say her tidings created some heart-burning even among those of her classmates who could not have written a page in the magazine grammatically, or were too lazy to send in any contributions to it.

But such is poor human nature, alas!

CHAPTER III

THE MYSTERY OF THE TYPESCRIPT

VIOLET had noticed that the head girl said 'your three contributions' instead of 'your two contributions,' but she was so excited she did not correct Bella, and told herself afterwards, 'Oh, of course, Bella made a mistake.'

And now as the days went by she was consumed with impatience for the first of the month to come, so that she might see her two effusions in all the glory of print. She had attached her name to the Paris article, but had written the other under the pen-name of 'Fifth Former.'

The first of the month came in due course, and when she went that morning to her study she was overjoyed to see a brand new copy of the *Bolsoverian* lying upon her table. She snatched it up at once, and turned to the Contents' page.

Yes, there they were—next to one another—'A Visit to Paris,' by Violet Charteris, page 9, and 'A Cricket Match under Difficulties,' by Fifth Former, page 12.

Violet was hurriedly turning over the leaves to page 9, when her study door crashed open, and in burst Gladys Colvin, white and seething with anger, brandishing another copy of the *Bolsoverian*.

'You mean, false, low-down thing!' rapped out the prefect. 'Ah, you've got a copy of the magazine, and are no doubt gloating over your supposed cleverness. But you might have been content with having one article published. When I suggested to you to write

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of some merry adventure, I never thought you would be so false as to go and let everybody know of the piccalilli incident. What will Miss Cluny say?'

'Whatever do you mean, Gladys?' gasped Vi in supreme amazement. 'I haven't let everybody know of the piccalilli incident.'

'What! you deny it?' And Gladys thrust her copy of the magazine, opening it with her thumb at a certain page, over the copy Vi held.

The Fifth Form girl's eyes rested upon the two pages thus displayed before her and read, in utter astonishment, at the top of the second one—'A MERRY ADVENTURE IN A TRAIN,' by 'New Girl.'

Speechless for the moment, she ran her gaze quickly through the text just below and found that it was a fairly accurate account of the piccalilli episode, although no names were given. Miss Cluny, however, was referred to as 'a lady teacher at a school.' Gladys and the writer herself were described as two of her prospective pupils, and labelled respectively G—— and V——.

'What have you to say for yourself, Violet Charteris? What defence have you to make? After promising me that you would never let a soul know about it! The other girls are bound to ask you is it true, who the lady teacher was, who G—— is, and when and where it happened. And won't Miss Cluny be wild?'

'I—I never wrote this. I did not write this. I know nothing about it, Gladys, I do assure you,' gasped the horror-stricken Vi.

'What! Then who did write it, pray? If you didn't actually write it, you must have told somebody all about it, and that somebody wrote this. And you

promised me faithfully that you would not breathe a word about it to a soul.'

'And I have kept that promise. I have not told any one, Gladys.'

'What rot! Of course you must have done. And don't Gladys me. I'm not going to speak to you ever again. You'll be saying next that I either wrote it myself or told someone, who wrote it. I have done with you, Violet Charteris. Never you speak to me again. I certainly shan't to you, unless I'm absolutely obliged in my capacity as prefect.'

She was moving towards the door, when Violet rushed after her and caught her by the arm.

'I did not write it, nor tell a living soul. I am completely mystified. If you don't believe me, come with me now straightway to Bella Hodges's study. She'll be able to vindicate me. She will know who sent in the account.'

Gladys seemed impressed by her manner as well as by her words, and said:

'Very good, we'll see what Bella can tell us.'

They found the head girl glancing pleasedly through a copy of the magazine. Gladys plunged into the object of their visit at once.

'We want to know, Bella,' said she, 'who wrote this—"A Merry Adventure in a Train"?''

'Why, of course you wrote it, Violet Charteris,' returned Bella.

'I wrote it!' gasped Violet. 'No, I didn't. I know nothing at all about it, as I have just been telling Gladys here.'

'You didn't write it! Why, I have your typescript here.'

And the editress opened a drawer of her table and took out a bundle of very grimy and untidy-looking

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manuscripts; for printers return 'copy' in anything but as clean or neat a condition as they generally receive it.

She ran her finger and eye quickly through the bundle, taking out three typewritten MSS., which she laid before Gladys and Vi.

The Fifth Former recognized two of the MSS. as her contributions, then stared in utter amazement and bewilderment, completely dumbfounded, at the third MS., which bore her name, 'Violet Charteris,' typewritten—like everything else on the page—in the top right-hand corner of this.

It was the manuscript of 'A Merry Adventure in a Train,' and—Violet's brain positively reeled as she also saw that all the 'd's' on the page before her would have looked like italicized 'a's,' had their tops not been inked in, the same as in the case of the two other MSS. which bore her name.

'Well, now, what have you to say for yourself, Violet Charteris?' the indignant tones of Gladys broke in upon her bemused brain. 'Can you deny it any longer? There is your name at the top of the MS., and I recognize that battered "d" of your typewriter, for Sophie Jessop used to have that machine last term.'

'I—I am the victim of some artful person who discovered our secret, and has used my name and my typewriter—that is all I can say,' gasped poor Vi. And, bursting into tears, she rushed from the room, leaving Gladys to explain matters as that prefect thought fit to the head girl.

Vi could do no prep. that morning, she was too upset by the wholly inexplicable and almost incredible occurrence. All pleasure, too, was gone as regarded seeing herself in print. She had not even

the heart to read her own two contributions to the magazine, although she read the one which she was so unjustly accused of having written, from first word to last, and then a second time over, in the faint hope of discovering from how it was worded who the real author was. But neither the words nor the style conveyed any clue, and she went into morning school in a state bordering almost on distraction.

Miss Cluny treated her with icy coldness, and it was plain that the mistress had read 'A Merry Adventure in a Train,' and was very much annoyed with her as its supposed authoress.

At 'break,' Doreen Loftus, Mabel Rogers, Cicely Comerford, and Irene Crosby, flocked around her, the first-mentioned singing out:

'Oh, Violet, it was you, wasn't it, who wrote that sketch "A Merry Adventure in a Train" in this month's *Bolsoverian*. Tell us all about it, do. Who was G——, and who was the victim? My, what fun it must have been! I did laugh when I read it. Was the lady a mistress at your last school—St. Agatha's?'

'I'm not going to tell any of you anything at all about it. I don't wish to speak about it,' Vi rapped out, and she rushed swiftly away to another part of the playground, leaving them staring stupidly at one another.

'She just made it up, if you ask me,' said Cicely Comerford, and she doesn't like to admit it; as if there wouldn't be more credit in inventing such a merry tale than in just relating something that really happened.'

As prefect of the Fifth, Gladys Colvin always took the head of that Form's table at dinner and tea. She completely ignored Violet at both meals; and,

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conscious of her own innocence, the Fifth Former held her nose also high in the air and behaved as if the prefect did not exist.

That evening at prep., however, Violet tied a short length of black thread upon the back of her typewriter, so that if the carriage were moved, the thread must snap. She determined to do this every morning and evening, just before she left her study, in order to learn whether any one again used her machine without her knowledge.

‘Then it will be up to me,’ she told herself, ‘to discover who that someone is and what the game underlying it all is. I feel sure that whoever wrote that sketch, in my name and purporting to come from me, has some sort of spite either against me or against Gladys Colvin. I cannot imagine, though, who it can be, any more than I can quite see yet what the motive was.’

She had chummed in more with a girl named Lucy Mason than with Mabel Rogers, Doreen Loftus, or any of the rest of her Form, and it was on the third evening after she had first set her little trap for the unknown user of her typewriter that Lucy happened to accompany her to her study at the beginning of prep.

After a while, just as her visitor was about to depart, Violet went to her typewriter, lifted off the cover, and looked at it.

The thread was broken! Someone had used her machine again, without her knowledge!

CHAPTER IV

THE TRICKSTER UNMASKED

LUCY,' she cried out excitedly. 'Come here! I know I can trust you—that you are not the culprit. Someone is using my machine behind my back, though I don't altogether know why, except that it would seem to be to try and get me into some trouble. You see this broken thread. I fastened it this morning to the carriage, so that any one using the machine would be bound to snap it. Someone must have used the machine since this morning.'

'But who would want to use it?' asked the practical Lucy.

'Don't ask me. I haven't the faintest idea. But come with me to Bella Hodges's study, now, right away. I am going to tell her that someone is using my typewriter secretly, and ask her to help me to think of a way of catching whoever it is.'

'Right-o!' replied Lucy.

She went at once to the door, and, opening it, stepped out into the corridor. Violet, following close behind, saw her suddenly stiffen and stare amazedly at something in the direction of the stairs.

Violet promptly turned her eyes thitherward, and beheld, to her equal amazement, a girlish form, with a cloak turned inside out drawn over her head like a hood or monk's cowl, in the act of thrusting a feather-brush in at the apparently open door of Gladys Colvin's study!

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As prefect of the Fifth, Gladys occupied the first study in the corridor allotted to that Form.

A cloud of thin black dust, like soot, floated out of the doorway of the prefect's study, accompanied by a startled, muffled cry in its owner's well-known tones. Then immediately the hooded figure outside in the corridor pulled the door to, and ran with a cord, which she had evidently fastened to the door-handle, to the opposite study-door, and hitched it around this.

Breaking from the surprised spell that had bound her for the moment, Violet raced swiftly forward. The becloaked one heard her footsteps, gave vent to a cry of dismay, and turned to run for the stairs. But ever more haste, less speed. She tripped over one end of the disguising cloak which hung down in front of her, stumbled and fell her length upon the floor.

As she was scrambling up, Violet reached her side and grabbed hold of the cloak, pulling it from her head and shoulders and disclosing the alarmed face of Mabel Rogers.

In the same instant a loud hammering came upon the door of Gladys Colvin's study.

'Undo the rope and release Gladys, Lucy,' Violet panted. 'What does this mean, Mabel Rogers?'

'Be a sport! Let me go and say nothing—don't give me away,' pleaded Mabel. 'I was only ragging Gladys.'

'You'll have to explain yourself to Gladys,' returned Violet, sharply. 'I scent something behind this. No, you don't! you're not going to get away. You stay here until Gladys comes.'

Lucy Mason quickly freed the prefect's door, and Gladys emerged, with her face as black as any

nigger's, from the sooty brush which had been thrust into it.

'Who did it? You, Mabel Rogers! Whatever for?'

Mabel attempted a sickly grin.

'It was only just a bit of fun, Gladys,' she said. 'I felt I must have some, and as we used to be such chums——'

'Was it you, Mabel Rogers, who used my typewriter since morning prep.?' sharply and acidly interrupted Violet.

Mabel started violently, and gave her a quick, scared glance.

'How did you know?' she was beginning, then bit her tongue and remained silent.

'You have betrayed yourself,' Violet responded. 'It doesn't matter just now how I knew. It was you also then who used it before—who wrote "A Merry Adventure in a Train," in the *Bolsoverian*. I should like to know how you knew about that.'

'Find out!' snarled Mabel. And throwing aside the cloak and soot-covered feather-brush, she made a wild dash for her own study, which was between Gladys's and Violet's.

'After her, quick!' cried Violet. 'I believe if we are sharp we may learn what her motive was in sending in the sketch in my name, Gladys.'

She always afterwards said the idea came to her like an inspiration.

Gladys and Lucy chased after her in the wake of the fleeing Mabel, just as all the other study doors flew open, disgorging their inmates, curious to learn the cause of the disturbance.

Mabel gained her study first, and made a frantic clutch at a typewritten letter upon the table. But

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Violet was hotfoot after her, and prevented her tearing it up.

Gladys secured it in the struggle which ensued, and read it out aloud, while the baffled Mabel dropped into a chair and covered her face with her hands. This is what the prefect read:

‘Dear Enid,—Oh, I have had such fun to-day! I ragged the prefect of our Form, Gladys Colvin, properly. I got a feather-brush from the housemaid’s cupboard, put it up my study chimney so as to make it all sooty, and then I waited until all my fellow-Fifths were deep in evening prep., when I crept out with a cloak, turned inside out, covering my face. Of course I left a space in the cloak so that I could see what I was doing. I went softly to our prefect’s study-door, put a noosed rope gently over the handle and then, holding the free end of the rope in my hand, knocked at the door.

‘Of course, Gladys Colvin came to it, as I took no notice of her calls to go in; and the moment she opened it, I thrust the sooty brush into her face, so as to black it all over, then pulled the door quickly to, ran to the study door opposite and coiled the rope around its handle, so that she could not get out after me. Wasn’t it a fine rag? I think I have paid her properly for being so nasty over my writing about the piccalilli incident in the train.

‘No more at present from your old chum,
Vi.’

All the other Fifths had crowded silently and wonderingly into Mabel’s study by the time Gladys had finished reading the above. Every one of them was so mystified that none even laughed at or commented upon their prefect’s sooty face, which she had made

worse in appearance by wiping with her handkerchief, while trying to get out of her room.

‘I never wrote that letter,’ Violet gasped. ‘She must have written it.’

‘Yes, and on your typewriter, for the tops of all the small “d’s” are missing. She hasn’t had time to ink them in,’ said Gladys. ‘You are bowled out properly, Mabel Rogers and the best thing you can do now is to tell us all what your motive was.’

‘Can’t you guess?’ replied Mabel. ‘I was jealous of you because you were promoted to the Sixth. If you were first in Upper Fourth last year, I ran you close, and should have been put up also. I overheard you and Violet talking about the leaking jar of piccalilli. It was on first day of term, and you were both in her study and had left the door open. I happened to be passing, heard you laughing, and listened. When you told us Fifths that Bella Hodges wanted some of us to write for the *Bolsoverian* and said any merry adventure would do, I saw my opportunity of setting you both by the ears and getting my revenge, seeing that you didn’t want it known about the incident. And it was just into my hands, I considered—Violet’s typewriter having that battered “d,” which of course we all knew about.’

‘Oh, how could you, Mabel?’ asked Lucy Mason in disgust.

‘That letter you have just read I wrote on Violet’s typewriter this morning during “break.” I had scribbled it out roughly, and so only had to make a copy of it. I meant to slip it inside Violet’s *Bolsoverian* before to-morrow morning, and then get Cicely Comerford to borrow it for me, so that she or I might find it. And of course then I would have contrived that you would learn of it and get hold of

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it in some way. I don't know whether Violet knows any Enid, except Enid Sumner in the Upper Fourth and little Enid Meredith in the Second Form. I chose that name simply because it was the first one with a small "d" in it that came into my head.'

There was the silence of utter stupefaction in her study when she ceased speaking. Gladys Colvin was the first to break it.

'Shut the door, one of you,' she said quietly to the girls at it. 'And now all of you listen to me. This matter will go no further, Mabel Rogers, if you and every one else present agree to keep mum about it. Otherwise I shall go to the Head and tell all about it. I don't suppose any of you want Mabel expelled?'

'No, no, of course not,' every one cried.

'Very good, then! That settles it. Let no one talk about this business. If you want to know why I was so indignant over the publication in the *Bolsoverian* of that wretched little sketch, "A Merry Adventure in a Train," I don't mind telling you that it was because the lady teacher referred to is your own Form-mistress; and I am sure you don't want to hurt her feelings, any more than Vi and I did, by publishing the information broadcast. So please all of you let the matter drop, and we'll be a happy family once more. Come along, Vi, back to my study! I owe you an apology and want to be friends again. You come also, Lucy Mason! I'm going to see Miss Cluny afterwards and clear you in her eyes, Vi.'

TWO Girl Guides ride against
time to save a countryside.

WHEN THE RESERVOIR BURST

By Flora Ferguson.

Sing a song, sing a song,
As you march and tramp along!
That's the way to jolly be,
And to make all sadness flee.
Sing a song, sing a song,
As you march and tramp along!

SEVEN Girl Guides, loudly and gaily chanting the above, swung in patrol formation round the corner of the reservoir embankment and made to cut diagonally across the open meadow behind it. They had just come through a gate leading off a rather quiet country road.

Marching in front, carrying the flag of the patrol, was an athletic-looking, handsome girl—the patrol leader, of course, as the badge in her hat and the two perpendicular white stripes worn on her left pocket would have testified, had she not been carrying the flag.

This had stitched upon it on both sides the crest of a bantam, for the patrol was called the Bantams; and all the girls wore red and yellow shoulder-knots as their colours and had an emblem badge sewn over the left pocket flap.

All at once the patrol leader half turned, so as to face the corner of the reservoir, and raised her patrol flag straight up over her head. It was the signal to halt or stop, and promptly all the other girls came to a standstill and looked inquiringly at her.

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Without a word, she pointed to the corner of the reservoir embankment. Every one of her six fellow-Guides immediately swivelled their eyes from her to the point indicated and—seeing nothing out of the way or ordinary—looked uncomprehendingly.

‘What was it, Marion? A rat—or something?’ asked little Molly Lang, the youngest member of the patrol and a ‘tenderfoot,’ involuntarily recoiling a step or two.

‘Of course it must have been something,’ grinned Bertha Poulton, a second-class guide, ‘though I can’t see anything.’

‘Can none of you see anything—something very much to be alarmed about?’ asked Marion Bright, the patrol leader. ‘Don’t you see what I’m referring to, Doris?’

‘Do you mean that great crack in the bank?’ returned Doris Mason, who was her Second or next-in-command. ‘I don’t see anything else.’

‘I do mean that great crack. It shouldn’t be,’ replied the leader excitedly. ‘There oughtn’t to be a crack like that in the bank of a reservoir. Don’t you understand? It can only mean that the bank is giving way!’

‘Goodness!’

‘Oh, you don’t say!’

And there was a general retrograde movement by all her patrol, while every girl’s face blanched—except hers.

‘It may be that there is no need for any great alarm,’ went on Marion Bright, quietly. ‘But it’s plainly our duty to warn the engineer in charge of the reservoir at once, so that he may do whatever’s necessary. Very possibly he already knows of the crack, and has sent for men to repair it. Right

about face, Bantams, and back at "Scouts' Pace" to the gate of the waterworks. Follow your leader. Quick-march!'

She waved her right hand and her flag in circles over her head as the signal for the patrol to go back the way it had come, for she always accompanied any order by word of mouth with hand signals, in order to accustom her patrol to these, only signalling by means of her whistle when they were widely separated.

All leading off with the left foot, the Guides moved at a smart pace back along the base of the high, sloping, grass-covered bank of the reservoir towards the road they had so lately left. As they went, the Second, Doris Mason, fell into step beside her leader.

'Great goodness, Marion,' she whispered, hoarsely. 'if this end of the reservoir bursts the water will go rushing like a great tidal wave down the valley, sweeping away everything before it—wiping out everything in its path!'

'That's what I fear, Doris. It's all downhill that way, for seven miles. Glenton and Woodside villages, and every farmhouse, would be simply wiped out, as you say. The flood would be too awful to think of. But, of course, there may be no such danger. The waterworks' people may know of the crack and consider there is nothing to be alarmed about—may think it hardly worth troubling about, yet. Let us hope so, at any rate.'

They had covered twenty paces, and Marion now gave the command to 'double,' jerking her flag rapidly up and down several times as the signal, also.

All took to their heels, running at a jog-trot, with short, sharp steps, hands swinging loosely. Marion

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Bright shot ahead of her Second, and, being the best runner of her patrol, as she was also its best all-round athlete, quickly outdistanced all her following. She gained the gateway first, and sprang out on to the road, which went past the side of the waterworks.

'You all keep on at Scouts' Pace,' she called out, pointing with her flag in the direction they were to go, and wheeling in that direction herself. 'I'm going on ahead to learn whether the waterworks' people know of the crack.'

She raced away at top speed up the road, which was all uphill, leaving the other girls to follow at 'Scouts' Pace'—that is, alternately walking and running twenty paces at a time. This mode of progression enables one to go a long distance fairly fast without exhaustion.

It was a fair sprint to the big, open-barred gate of the waterworks at the top of the hill, but Marion did it in almost record time, and, while yet her patrol were not half way thither. The gate stood ajar, and she darted inside and up the steps to the door of the power-house, through the windows of which huge iron wheels could be seen slowly revolving with a steady, monotonous, reverberant 'thump-thump.'

The station was only a small auxiliary one, the main one being some miles away on the other side of the town of Ainsley.

Inside the power-house Marion rushed, without let or hindrance, as the outer door stood wide open and the inner one, half of glass, was not locked. Two men in overalls were attending to the engines.

'I'm a Girl Guide, as you can see by my uniform,' Marion panted. 'There's a big, ugly-looking crack in the far left-hand corner of the reservoir bank. I don't know whether you are aware of it, but I

thought it best to tell you. It's not merely the earth that's cracked; it looked to me as if the concrete behind was cracking also.'

'What! What's that? A crack in the bank, you say, missy?' gasped the older man, and a very startled look sprang into his face. 'Not merely the earth, but the concrete behind is cracked as well?'

'Yes, I feel sure that the casing is cracking as well. You didn't know about it, then?'

'No. Come on, Pullen! This must be seen to. Let's hope it's nothing to be much alarmed about. You could see the concrete casing through the crack in the earth, then, and that looked as if it was cracking also, missy?'

'Yes.'

'My heaven! with this high wind and the head o' water we've got——'

The man did not finish the sentence, but with the other man rushed hot-foot out of the power-house, followed as smartly by Marion, who had not yet quite got back her breath after her sharp sprint. She saw her fellow-Bantams marching in at the gate and signalled to them silently to halt.

'Our bikes,' cried the younger man, Pullen, pointing to where two push-bicycles leaned against an outhouse.

Seizing the bicycles, the two men ran them towards a little side-gate, or wicket, leading into the cross-road which flanked the reservoir—the road that ran downhill continually, past the little villages of Glenton and Woodside, for at least seven miles, as Marion had said.

'Jump up behind me, missy,' said the older man, as he straddled his machine, outside in the roadway.

Marion put one foot on the step behind him, and,

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swinging the other leg free of the ground, rested her hands on his shoulders.

'Follow your leader at Scouts' Pace again, back the way we came—to where we saw the crack in the bank,' she sang out to her patrol.

'Go on without me, Bantams,' exclaimed her Second, Doris Mason; and that girl ran forward, and, not waiting to be invited, mounted in like manner to her leader behind the other man, Pullen.

He nodded, and said, 'All right, miss.' Then away both men pedalled, bearing the two girls with them, down the road, the five other Guides following at the double.

Within a few moments the side of the great oblong reservoir had been skirted; and, all four riders hastily dismounting, the engine-man and his assistant ran their bicycles inside the gate in the fence, and accompanied by Marion and Doris, hurried along the rear bank to the far corner where the crack was.

As they beheld it again, both Girl Guides saw that it had lengthened and widened considerably. It extended now from more than half way up the slope to the ground level, and was so deep that the concrete casing within it was exposed pretty well all along its length. The concrete was badly cracked also, in places, wherever it showed.

'Merciful Heaven!' gasped the engineer. 'We must open the sluices at once and relieve the pressure. It's the high wind has done it, blowing the water so much this way. Powers above!' as a distinct 'creak-creak' came from the crack and the earth on either side of it visibly trembled, following a strong gust of wind over the top of the bank full in their faces.

The weather had been very stormy for over a week, and, although no rain had fallen that morning, the wind was still very boisterous and blowing steadily, with almost the force of a gale, in the same direction—that is down the valley. The water in the reservoir must have been continually washing or dashing against the bank there.

‘The whole bank here may give way any minute,’ groaned the engineer, clasping his head in dismay. ‘You two girls, take our bikes and ride for all you’re worth down the valley, and warn the people in Glenton and Woodside to clear out of their homes—to drop everything and get on to the high ground, or it may be too late, and they’ll be drowned inside their houses. Come on, Pullen, we must open the sluices, and pray heaven we may yet be in time.’

Marion and Doris needed no second bidding. Each seized one of the bicycles and sprang astride it, even as a second fierce gust of wind blew down over the top of the bank, and another ominous ‘creak-creak’ issued from the exposed masonry within it. The two men ran up the bank and along its top to one side, bawling to the rest of the Bantams coming hurrying down the road:

‘Go back! Make for Ainsley! Save yourselves and warn the first policeman you meet, or ring up the fire-brigade station. The bank is giving way—the reservoir may burst if we don’t ease off the pressure of water in time.’

With faint screams of consternation, the Bantams in the road instantly halted, then whirled about and fled back up the hill at the double, what time, their leader and second-in-command rode neck or nothing, bumping badly, over the rough ground of the field to the side-gate they had just entered. Wheeling

sharply in the opposite direction to their fleeing fellow-Guides then, the pair tore away downhill. The bicycles were small men's, and they rode with ease, astride.

They pedalled their hardest at first, but were soon able to 'coast' at racer speed, owing to the gradient. Up and over a slight rise they shot. A superior-looking farmhouse showed just ahead, embowered in trees.

'You ride on, Doris!' screamed Marion. And, slightly swerving out of her companion's way towards the farther footwalk, she bawled to a man whom she saw working in a cornfield some little way off: 'The reservoir—the reservoir is bursting. Save yourself!'

She wildly indicated the waterworks at the same time. But the man only straightened himself and stared amazedly, evidently not having heard what she called.

Marion repeated her shout and again pointed excitedly at the reservoir, even while she rode on after Doris, but heading diagonally for the farmhouse.

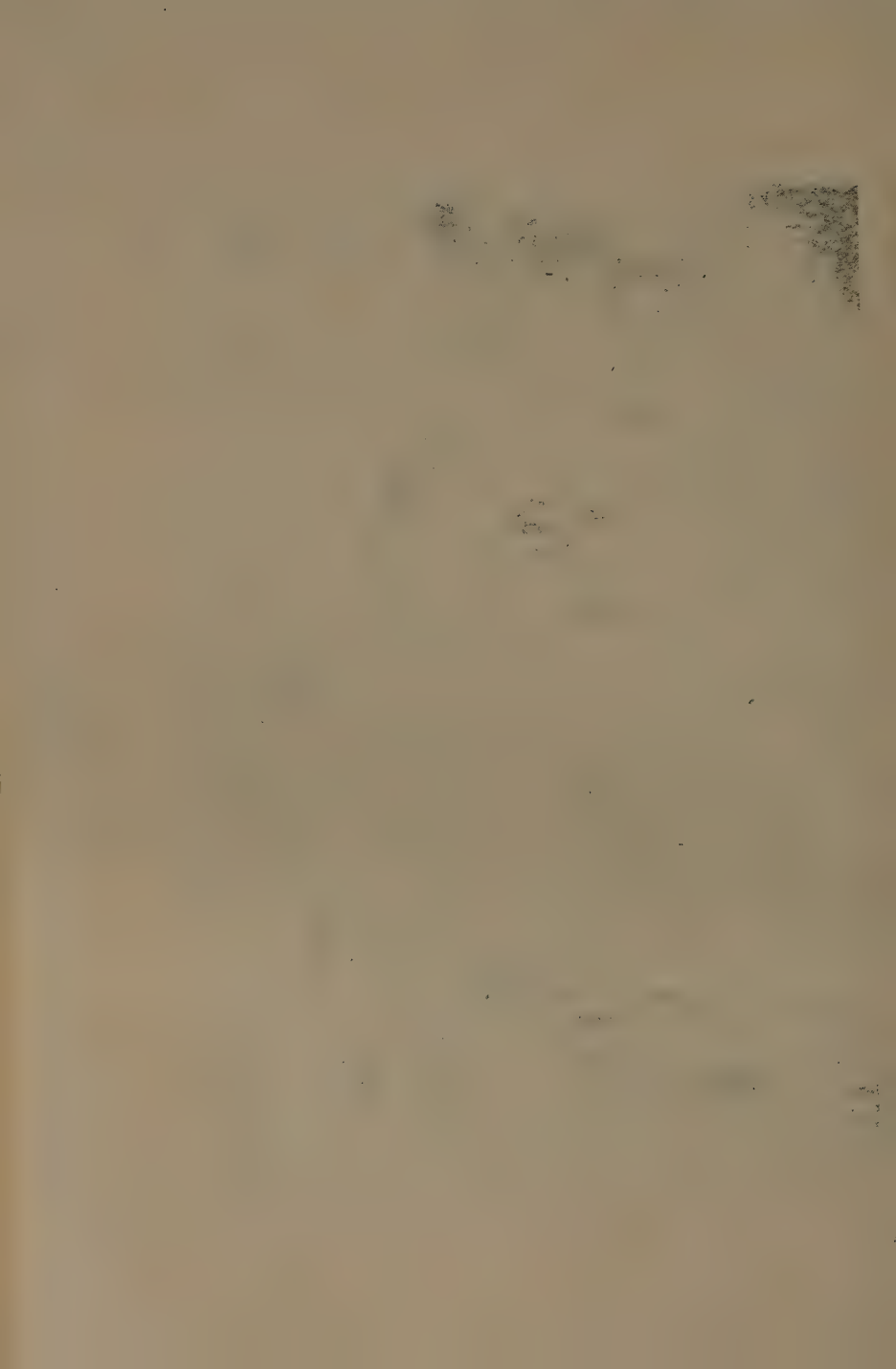
It was plain enough that the man had caught her words this time. He started violently, gave one affrighted glance at the reservoir, and came running at top speed towards the farm. Inside the open gate of this the Bantam leader shot, still shouting at the top of her voice:

'The reservoir! The reservoir is bursting! Clear out! Save yourselves!'

Up to the front door of the silent little farmhouse she swept. She did not dismount but, straddling her machine, she reached out and plied the knocker as if she meant to bring the place down.



‘The reservoir is bursting—may go any minute.’



Then round she whirled her machine, ready to race off.

A startled-looking woman thrust her head out of an open upstairs casement.

'What's the matter? The 'ouse might be on fire from the noise you're making,' she called down, half angrily.

'It's worse than fire. Clear out, 'all of you, for your lives' sake,' Marion shouted back. 'The reservoir is bursting—may go any minute. Take to the high ground behind the house. Leave everything. You haven't a moment to lose.'

The woman's indignation vanished, and she raised a terrified wail. But without waiting for more, Marion was off once more, pedalling her hardest out through the gate again and down the road, after Doris, who was a long way ahead.

It is singular how humorous ideas will occur to one even at such moments of high excitement and even peril.

'That woman soon changed her tune,' Marion said to herself, as she dashed away down hill again. 'I suppose she had it on the tip of her tongue to tell me what she thought of me for knocking like that. She'd have given me the length of her tongue, as the saying is, if it had been anything in the ordinary way. Indeed, it's a wonder that she didn't call out right away, "Nothing to-day, thank you!"'

Pedalling as she probably never pedalled before, Marion overtook Doris Mason, as the latter was giving the alarm at another farm. She added her rousing shouts to her Second's, as she went sailing swiftly by.

The village of Glenton was visible now before her, at the foot of a still steeper gradient than any she

had yet traversed. Down into the village, or rather hamlet, she careered at full speed, bawling frenziedly, hoarsely:

‘Ainsley Reservoir is bursting! Save yourselves! Make for the hills! Drop everything, and clear out for your lives’ sake!’

There were a few people in sight, mostly women and girls, loitering or gossiping. They cried out in horror; and, slowing down and circling round beside them, Marion repeated her terror-inspiring words, and bade them warn their neighbours.

Some at once on that rushed off helter-skelter towards their own homes, but others darted into shops near, bawling the news; and, satisfied that the whole hamlet would be speedily apprised of the danger, and that she need not tarry further, Marion swung out into the middle of the road and headed downhill again.

The road was fairly level just there, and before she could get up any great speed, Doris Mason appeared on the scene once more, coasting alongside; and, still yelling their warning to all and sundry whom they met or overtook, the two Guides raced on out of Glenton.

A gently undulating but continually dropping road lay before them, with bare meadow land on either hand and only a few houses dotted along it. More than a mile away they could just discern the roofs and smoking chimneys of Woodside hamlet. The road, unfortunately, wound repeatedly—twisted sharply here and there in hairpin bends.

In rounding one of these, they almost collided head-on with a big six-seater motor-car. They just swerved in time; and with an angry snort the driver of the car applied his brakes and turned in his seat to give them ‘the length of his tongue.’

‘Confound it! What do you mean by——?’ he was beginning, and was about to drive on again, when both girls raised one hand, and, dexterously wheeling about, yelled simultaneously:

‘Turn back! Turn back for your lives’ sake! Ainsley Reservoir is about to burst. Drive on in front of us and warn every one you see—warn the people of Woodside Hamlet.’

Besides the driver, who was a weedy young man, with a weak chin, there were three ladies—one elderly and two fairly young-looking, with a little boy and a little girl, in the car. The ladies all started screaming at our two Guides’ information, and the young man, in rather a flustered way, began turning the car round, forgetting to thank our heroines.

They did not wait for him to turn round, but raced on, expecting him every moment to overtake them and so closely hugging their proper side of the road, to enable him to pass them. Past two cross-roads they went, but the car did not come along.

‘The cowardly rotters! I do believe they’ve taken the first turning we passed so as to get away safely themselves,’ exclaimed Doris Mason. ‘They’ve cleared off out of the way of the danger and left it for us to warn the people of Woodside.’

Marion was about to agree with her, when there came, borne on a gust of wind, a low, sullen, continuous murmuring, like distant thunder. It came from away behind them—from far in their rear.

‘The bank’s given way, Marion! Can we do any more before the water overtakes us?’ gasped Doris in stony horror.

‘Come on! I don’t think it’s the bank burst. I believe it’s only the sluices opened. Ride! Ride!’

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The two Guides pedalled frantically. They were almost at the first doors of Woodside when behind them resounded a terrific, prolonged rumbling, like a thunder-peal. It seemed to shake the earth, woke all the echoes of the hills and woods around, and was instantly followed by a loud, indistinct roaring or rushing sound, as of a mighty wind.

‘Heaven preserve us and all in the valley! That’s the reservoir burst, right enough,’ screamed Marion. ‘Save yourselves! save yourselves! Ainsley Reservoir has burst, and the whole valley will be flooded. Fly—take to the hills, everybody, or you’ll be drowned.’

She shrieked the words as she and Doris drew almost level with the first house. But to their great satisfaction the two girls saw that the villagers had already in some way caught the alarm—that some were running from house to house, hammering on the doors and yelling the dread tidings to the inmates; that others were bringing out sleeping infants or bed-ridden or decrepit old parents; while more could be seen making off as fast as they could towards the hills at either side of the village, mothers or grandparents dragging small children along and carrying the youngest.

The postmaster and others at Glenton had rung up the postmaster and friends at Woodside on the telephone and given the alarm, before seeking their own safety.

‘Thank heaven they know of the danger. Glengorm Mill, Doris!’ bawled Marion. ‘And then, glory be, our work will be done. There’s no other house in the way. The valley ends there.’

On, therefore, the two devoted Guides scorched, through the panic-stricken village, never looking

behind, or turning aside, but deftly dodging the fleeing, screaming people in the way. The ever-increasing roar of the fast-following flood spurred them to greater exertion into a most desperate spurt.

Would they reach the mill in time, or would they be overtaken and swept away like chips, they and their machines, by the merciless waters? Even now it was not too late to save themselves by abandoning the inmates of Glengorm Mill to their fate, turning aside and riding for the hills flanking them.

But the two brave girls set their teeth and only pedalled the faster down hill. They would warn the miller and his family, or share their doom!

Marion shot ahead a few yards, but Doris, with a frenzied effort, caught her up; and once more they rode side by side, neck and neck craned over the handlebars.

Hurrah! The mill hove in sight as they swept round a bend in an avenue of trees. The mill-wheel was not turning, for the mill had fallen on evil days—business had greatly depreciated.

Across the little bridge spanning the mill-stream, the girls raced, still side by side and straining their utmost, the while yelling their warning with their almost bursting lungs. The door of the house flew open before they reached it, and out came tumbling the miller with all his family.

‘Ainsley Reservoir has burst. You’ve no time to get to the hills. The flood must be close behind us. Take to the mill! It’s of stone and solidly built, and should stand the shock,’ screamed Marion. ‘Give me the little girl—quick! Doris, you carry the little boy! You look after your wife and the old lady, miller!’

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Springing from their bicycles, and abandoning these as they could no longer be of any use, the two Guides pounced on the two tiny children and, lifting these in their arms, ran with them to the great stone mill. The miller followed, supporting his half-fainting wife and aged mother.

Inside the ground-floor of the mill, they all ran; and, still carrying the little girl, Marion led the way up the ladder to the first floor, while the miller locked the door—not that the lock was likely to keep out the flood, unless this had lost force considerably in its descent of the valley.

Although quite out of breath, Marion without a pause went on up the second ladder, with her whimpering little burden, to the next floor—the topmost. Then, hurriedly putting the little children down, the two brave Girl Guides rushed down the ladder again to the first floor to help the miller with his womenfolk.

Half dragging, half carrying the breathless and practically helpless old grandmother, they got her up also into the attic, behind the miller and his wife, just as the fast-approaching roar without drowned all other sounds and struck deafeningly on the ear.

Then—then there came a mighty clap against the wall of the mill, and, in spite of its solid, almost lighthouse-like construction, the whole building quivered and shook.

Simultaneously the windows below came in bodily before mighty waves of water which washed high above them, and jets, like those from huge pipes or sluices—jets as thick as the windows were high and wide—poured in ceaselessly. Everything gave instantly before or under the force of those awful jets—both ladders and the floor-boards of the first

storey. Down into the ground-floor went collapsing all on the first floor.

And the terrified, trembling occupants of the mill-attic clung together with faces white as death and legs that threatened to give way under them as they beheld the swirling, boiling flood fill the vacant, wrecked space below them, in a trice, as it seemed, and lap up almost to the beams of the floor on which they stood.

It seemed inevitable that they, too, must be engulfed—that the flood must rise to where they were—come through the trap or force up the floor-boards and drown them all like rats under the roof.

Higher, and still higher, to their intense mental agony, their unbearable suspense, the whirlpool below them mounted. They had no eyes as yet for anything else but that ever-ascending maelstrom, no thought but the hope against hope that it would cease to rise in time to avert their doom. But had they looked forth through the little windows beside them, they would have seen the flood extending from one side of the valley to the other, obliterating all landmarks in what seemed a wild, fast-flowing river of snow.

The high-leaping spray broke in tremendous sheets over the mill-top, and crash went the window which faced up the valley, the splinters of glass fortunately missing them all. They were drenched by the showers that came in, however, and also by the great clouds of spray thrown up by the whirlpool below them, in the mill itself.

Away past the mill, on the broad bosom of the madly racing flood, went whirling fragments of haystacks, thatched and wooden roofs, uprooted bushes

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and trees, tables and chairs, and portions of fences or sheds.

Like her companions, the Guide patrol leader was anxiously, feverishly, watching the rise of the maelstrom beneath her. It was seething within less than a foot of the beams supporting the attic floor, when she uttered a shout of joy that they all heard above the ceaseless but now somewhat subdued roar of the waters.

‘It’s going down! It’s dropping! It’s not as high as it was!’

She was right. The flood had not only ceased to rise, it was subsiding, and that quite rapidly.

It ran away with astonishing rapidity; and before long the intensely relieved inmates of the mill were gazing down through the shattered, gaping floor below them upon a tangled mass of all sorts of debris, entangled in the dripping machinery or imbedded in several inches of mud.

Outside it was much the same. The flood had gone as quickly as it had come—down the mill-race mainly into the ‘holm,’ or marshy ground beyond, where of course it had spread out and found its level. Everywhere the ground was covered with thick, viscous mud, littered with the heavier floating things the water had brought down the valley—tree-trunks, bedsteads, house furniture of all kinds, and fragments of wrecked houses.

‘Oh, glory be to God we are saved!’ cried the miller’s wife, ecstatically.

‘Yes, thanks to these two noble young ladies, under heaven,’ said her husband, with tears of gratitude in his eyes; and he wrung our Guides’ hands, then embraced his family.

The poor old grandmother was unable to speak,

but her face beamed with joy as she, too, clasped Marion's and Doris's hands in hers.

The two Guides themselves shed tears and laughed hysterically, now that all danger was over.

With the ladders and intervening floor gone, the question at once arose, however, as to how they were to get down to earth, especially the women and little children, and so they all had to pull themselves together to solve the difficulty.

It was Marion Bright who did so.

The fixed pulley just above the attic window, used for taking in sacks of corn or lowering the bags of flour, was still intact, and the rope remained around it, having simply floated in place on the tearing flood.

'We can loop the rope around your armpits, sir,' said Marion, 'and lower you to the ground through the broken window, with your wife's and mother's help.'

He was not a big or heavy man, and this was done safely. Then the two little children were sent down to him in succession, each tied securely to the rope-end; next the old grandmother, and next again his wife. He then took hold of his end of the rope and Doris tied herself to her end, when she was lowered by him, Marion afterwards descending in like manner.

The bursting of Ainsley Reservoir will long be remembered in the neighbourhood. Thanks to the noble, self-sacrificing devotion of Marion and Doris, and the fact that the inhabitants of Woodside were warned over the telephone, no loss of human life had occurred, although the destruction of property was dreadful. All the houses higher up the valley were destroyed—swept away like so many houses of

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cards, and the villages of Glenton and Woodside were almost obliterated.

But subscriptions for the relief of the poor, homeless, and despoiled people were promptly raised all over the country, and Government and the Water Company also came handsomely to the rescue, so that the terrible distress occasioned was alleviated in great measure.

As for our two heroines, their portraits appeared in all the daily papers, with a full and glowing account of their gallant service. Indeed, a poet celebrated it in verse, which was put to music, and 'The Ride of the Girl Guides' became a popular song. Moreover, both Marion and Doris were presented with the bronze cross and red ribbon—the highest possible award by the Girl Guide Organization, and only bestowed when the recipient has displayed special heroism or has faced extraordinary risk of life in saving life.

But Marion and Doris were as modest as they were brave, and to all admirers they protested that they had merely done their duty as Girl Guides.

AN enthralling story of a
schoolgirl impostor.

A FOURTH FORM MYSTERY

By Stella Merrick.

CHAPTER I

THE HEROINE OF THE WRECKED LINER

‘CORINNA MAYNARD has arrived, girls! Lottie Parkinson burst into the Fourth Form common room with this exclamation. It instantly produced great excitement, all her classmates breaking off their conversation or games of chess or draughts and turning eagerly towards her.

‘She has? Have you seen her?’

‘Where is she?’

‘What’s she like, Lottie? Nice or boulderish-looking?’

These and half-a-dozen other somewhat similar questions were at once flung at Lottie Parkinson’s devoted head.

‘Not so many questions all at once!’ Lottie replied. ‘Yes, I’ve seen her. I saw her for one fleeting moment as she was going into the Head’s office. You asked me what she’s like, Myra—nice or boulderish-looking? Well, of course, I can hardly answer that, seeing that I had only just a momentary glimpse of her as she crossed the hall; but she seemed all right—was dressed in slap-up style. Any-

way, she didn't wear a cowgirl's hat—or should it be a sheepgirl's? seeing she comes from New Zealand—or anything else outlandish, as well as I could tell.'

'As if she would,' said Myra Loder. 'I suppose the Head will be bringing her in presently to introduce her to us all, as she is in our Form.'

Why was there so much excitement in the Fourth at Eastongirt over the arrival of this girl from New Zealand, Corinna Maynard? It was because of her thrilling escape from being drowned through the sinking of the liner in which she had left her native shores. Midway between Dunedin, in South Island, New Zealand, and Hobart, in Tasmania, the liner which was named the *Norman Prince*, and was bound for England, was run into by another steamer, the *Gortby*, in the dead of night, and many of the passengers and crew were lost. Corinna Maynard and her mother, who was a widow and very wealthy, were taken off the sinking craft by the *Gortby*, and carried, along with their fellow-survivors, into Hobart, whence they had been able to continue their journey to England by the next liner.

They had had travelling with them Mrs. Maynard's lady companion and private secretary, a Mrs. Standforth, who was a widow, like her employer. This lady was lost in the wreck—was never seen again after the liner sank—and Mrs. Maynard and Corinna were naturally deeply distressed by her sad end. Every possible inquiry had been made by Corinna's mother in the hope that poor Mrs. Standforth might have been picked up by some other vessel, but no word was received of her; so it was generally believed that the sea had swallowed her up and her body would never be recovered.

No wonder, therefore, that the long-expected

Corinna Maynard's arrival at Eastongirt School caused the mild sensation it did.

She had been brought to the school a week or two before, of course, by her mother in order that due arrangement might be made for her reception, and that the Head, Miss Gardner, might put her through a preliminary examination to see what Form she was fitted for. The Head Mistress had found her rather backward for her years, but had thought it best to put her among girls of her own age, and somehow it had leaked out that she was to be in the Fourth; whereupon that Form was quite pleased and excited at the idea of having the heroine of so thrilling and sensational a shipwreck in their midst.

Lottie Parkinson was still answering questions as to what she was like, when the door of the common room opened, admitting the Head and the subject of their conversation. All eyes fastened eagerly upon the girl.

She was not pretty, by any manner of means. She was most ungainly, her hands and feet being noticeably much bigger than they should have been for her size, and her face had irregularly formed features, which wore a sour, resentful look—a look apparently habitual. Her nose was a decided snub, thus giving her also an air of superciliousness; her mouth was large, her jaw square and heavy, and her eyes were small and set very close together. Her hair, Eton cropped, was jet-black.

The only things at all attractive about her were the healthy tan of her olive skin, and the exquisite way in which she was garbed. It was evident that no expense had been spared as regarded her clothing, that she was well turned out in that respect. And as fine feathers make fine birds, or are supposed to,

some of the more snobbish of her fellow-Fourths promptly decided that her society would be well worth cultivating.

As a matter of fact, the whole school knew from what had appeared in the newspapers and had been retailed *ad nauseum* among the seniors that her dead father had owned one of the biggest and most prosperous sheep-rearing farms or 'stations' in all New Zealand, and had left her mother and her rich beyond the dreams of avarice.

'This is Corinna Maynard, girls,' said Miss Gardner. 'She is to be in your Form. You have all heard of her dreadful experience coming to England from her home in New Zealand, and I know that you will all receive her kindly on that account—try and make her feel at home amongst us. I have put her in your study, Myra Loder and Lottie Parkinson; so you two no doubt will take her under your care right away and be chummy with her.'

'We will gladly, madam,' replied Myra, advancing at once and taking the new girl's hand. Lottie Parkinson also stepped forward and greeted Corinna affably; and, turning on her heel, the Head took her departure.

Barely had the door closed upon Miss Gardner's retreating form when, before one of her still appraising classmates could say a word, Corinna rapped out sharply and petulantly:

'Now, for goodness sake, please, don't any of you ask me to tell you all about the sinking of the *Norman Prince*, and my rescue, along with my mother, by the *Gortby*, the steamer which ran into us. I am sick and tired of the whole thing, and would like to forget it. Wherever I've gone up to this it has been the only topic—the subject at once

broached, and I'm just fed up with answering questions about the affair. If you two girls the Head Mistress handed me over to—I didn't quite catch your names; Myra Something and Lottie Something, weren't they?—will be so good as to show me to the study we are to share, I'll be better pleased.'

All her classmates were taken aback and frozen into awkward, abashed silence by this outburst, for they had all been about to make a fuss of her and ply her with eager questions upon the very subject she thus tabooed. All were frozen into awkward silence, that is, except Florry Mitchell, who at once replied:

'Oh, don't be peeved! None of us, I am sure, wants to hear of your thrilling adventure, if you don't want to tell us of it. But one would have thought that you'd have liked to tell us so as to break the ice between us.'

With that, Florry turned her back on the new girl, went off to finish her game of chess with Clara Huntley; and such is the force of example that most of the other girls also turned away, resenting Corinna's ungracious tone and manner, while such as did not, only looked the more sheepish and crestfallen.

Myra Loder came to the relief of the situation, with the sweetness which was second nature with her.

'Oh, I can well understand, dear, how you feel,' she said. 'It must have been a most terrible experience. No wonder talking about it gets on your nerves. Come, then! Lottie Parkinson and I will show you the study we are to share. My name is Myra Loder.'

'Thank you! Myra Loder is your name? I shan't forget it. And yours is Lottie Parkinson? Ye-es, I

shall be glad if you will both take me under your wing for this evening at least. I hate crowds.'

And Corinna darted a vicious look in the wake of the outspoken Florry Mitchell. She had looked for the moment before Myra Loder spoke as though she half regretted her petulant outburst.

The three studymates quitted the room, and went up to their study, and there Myra's sunny disposition and Lottie's only too evident desire to be friendly had the effect of making Corinna a little more amiable and responsive.

Nevertheless, it was not surprising after her ungracious behaviour in the common room that the majority of her classmates—those who were not snobbish enough to be influenced by her fine clothes and the reports of her wealth—took a dislike to her and made no further overtures at friendliness. She did not appear to mind their aloofness. Rather, to all seeming, she preferred to be left to herself, to be ignored and not to be asked to join in the games, and would look on sourly while the others played.

Even good-natured, sunny Myra Loder and kindly-intentioned Lottie Parkinson, her studymates, could not understand her coldness and apparent distaste for bright conversation and merriment. They loyally defended her, however, when Florry Mitchell, Clara Huntley, and others of their Form accused her of being purse-proud and eaten up with self-importance.

'She's too big for her shoes, which are big enough in all conscience,' snorted Florry, some days after her coming to the school. 'If she thinks we are not good enough to mix with, let her get on with it, say I.'

'Oh, it's not that, I feel certain,' responded Myra.

CHAPTER II

A STARTLING INCIDENT IN CLASS

IN class, Corinna did not win the good opinion of her Form-mistress, Miss Fenwick, any more than she did her fellow-Fourths out of the classroom. She was very backward for a girl of her years, as we have said, and she would make no effort at improvement: she showed only sullen resentment, listened in chilly silence, when Miss Fenwick, speaking to her privately so as to spare her feelings, urged her to exert herself more.

A week or more had gone by, and Eastongirt had almost forgotten that it had in its midst the heroine of the most sensational shipwreck of recent times, when another new girl came to the school and was also put in the Fourth Form. Her name was Enid Lomax; and she was as pretty and graceful as Corinna was unattractive and ungainly. Enid Lomax had silky fair hair, which curled naturally, and which she wore long—it reached well below her waist—and her face was exquisitely formed, although, like Corinna's, of the deep olive tint produced by a tropic sun.

She came, it was understood, from Ceylon, and she was also, strangely enough, said to be the only child of a widowed mother, comfortably off. Curiously, too, she likewise showed a great disinclination to talk about herself or her previous life, but, unlike Corinna Maynard, she displayed no peevish resentment in the matter, but would laughingly turn the conversation, remarking:

‘Oh, my life out there was very much the same as yours is here, wasn’t at all interesting. I was at a big school like this. I think school life here in England will be far jollier, though. You have so much more liberty than we had.’

She was put in the same study as Florry Mitchell and Clara Huntley, and the three got on splendidly together from the first, for all her reticence as to her life abroad.

‘But then who could help liking Enid Lomax?’ Florry Mitchell said to Myra Loder and Lottie Parkinson the very next morning after her coming to Eastongirt. ‘She’s sweetness itself, like you, Myra, and yet full of fun. She told Clara and me no end of merry stories this morning at Prep.—kept us laughing so, we could hardly do any work.’

‘I’m sure I shall like her, then,’ responded Myra, and she added with a sigh, ‘I could wish Corinna Maynard was like that.’

‘Myra and I try to get on with Corinna—to humour her as much as we can, but really she’s impossible to get on with,’ groaned Lottie. ‘She’s that snappy and cantankerous, without any rhyme and reason often enough, that I can hardly keep my temper with her.’

Enid Lomax had been introduced the previous evening by the Head Mistress in the common room, just like Corinna Maynard had been, to all her fellow-Fourths, with the solitary exception of Corinna, who chanced to be absent at the time. Consequently, Corinna was the only one of her classmates who had not seen her before or heard her name when the Form went into morning school that day, a Thursday.

The Fourth occupied two dormitories, and Enid

Lomax had been placed in Number 2, whereas Corinna was in Number 1. Moreover, Corinna was late for Call-over before Prayers that Thursday morning, only just getting to her place in time to answer breathlessly to her name. And she did not notice the new girl either during Prayers or at breakfast, being as usual too self-absorbed.

The lesson Miss Fenwick first took that morning was French Author, and after Lottie Parkinson, Florry Mitchell, and another girl named Rhoda Walker had been called upon to translate passages, the Form-mistress said:

‘Now, Enid Lomax, I understand that you are rather good at French translation, and also that you went through this book at your previous school. You will not mind, therefore, I am sure, letting me see what you can do. I presume you prepared the allotted pages last night or this morning, the same as the rest of the class?’

Enid Lomax stood up in her place, open book in hand, with a slight, embarrassed blush upon her pretty face. But before she could utter a word, there came a piercing, hysterical scream of ‘Oh! oh! oh!’ from Corinna Maynard. The latter was sitting on the bench in front of Enid, and had turned swiftly to look at her.

Myra Loder, who sat on Corinna’s left hand, afterwards said, in utter perplexity:

‘Corinna seemed to me to give a violent start and gasp when Miss Fenwick said Enid’s name, just as though she knew the name. And then she whipped round, and stared and stared, as if she couldn’t believe her eyes, the whole time Miss Fenwick was speaking. Her face went deathly white; you would have thought she had seen a ghost. Her eyes seemed

to start out of her head; and then she turned scarlet and cried out, "Oh, oh, oh!" as you all heard, and fell in a dead faint across her desk.'

All the girls leaped to their feet in wild surprise and alarm at Corinna's startling outcry, to behold her, as Myra Loder said, fallen forward in a swoon across her desk!

Miss Fenwick at once vacated her seat and rostrum, rushed to the unconscious girl, and, perceiving that her face was flushed—that there was too much blood in it—raised her head and set her back against the desk behind. Every one of Corinna's classmates left their places and crowded round the pair concernedly. Enid Lomax, however, although she followed the others, kept in the background with all the apparent modesty of a new girl. She remained on the outside of the ring that was promptly made around the sufferer and the Form-mistress.

Her face had gone almost as crimson as Corinna's, but no one noticed the fact in the general confusion and excitement. A singular expression, too—as of some secret understanding—had leaped into her eyes; and, pursing her lips together, she nodded her head slowly two or three times in succession as though she knew or guessed the reason of Corinna's strange behaviour.

'Fetch a glass of water, one of you, quick!' Miss Fenwick ordered.

Enid Lomax was nearest the door, and she raced away immediately on the errand of mercy, the others letting her go alone. When she returned with the tumbler of water, Corinna had come round, and was sobbing hysterically, unable or unwilling to explain what had caused her to faint. Enid, with-

out a word, handed the glass of water to Esmée Brookes, and signed for her to pass it to Miss Fenwick. The Form-mistress made Corinna take a few sips, and then as the girl still seemed inclined to be hysterical, said:

‘Girls, I must take Corinna Maynard to the Head Mistress. There is nothing really wrong with her now, I am satisfied—nothing to be alarmed about, at any rate. She is hysterical, that is all, and will be all right shortly if by herself for a while. Come, Corinna, pull yourself together, and I will take you to Miss Gardner’s office!’

‘I—I don’t want to go there. I don’t want to see Miss Gardner. I won’t see her,’ Corinna cried in a more hysterical manner than ever.

But, taking her by the arm, Miss Fenwick led her almost by main force from the classroom. The other girls all looked at one another for an explanation of the scene.

‘Whatever was the cause of her going off like that?’ asked Doris Martin.

‘Ask us another,’ said Florry Mitchell.

‘She must surely be subject to fainting or fits,’ declared Eleanor Hawes.

And then it was that Myra Loder made the remark we have already recorded, namely, that Corinna had given a violent start and gasp on hearing Enid’s name, whipped round sharply, and stared as if she beheld a ghost, the colour leaving her face and then returning with a rush, and her eyes starting nearly out of her head.

On that, of course, all eyes turned amazedly and inquiringly upon Enid Lomax, and she now again turned crimson, but she did not faint from the sudden rush of blood to her head as Corinna had

done. Instead, she carried off her embarrassment by giving a light laugh, and observing:

‘Do you mean, Myra, that it was hearing my name and seeing me caused her to faint? Why, I never saw her before in my life, never saw her before this morning; and I am equally as positive that she never saw me before.’

They were all still excitedly discussing the affair—all that is, except Enid Lomax—Myra sticking to her guns and declaring she firmly believed it was something connected with Enid’s name or appearance that had upset Corinna, when Miss Fenwick returned and quietly bade them all resume their seats and the lesson.

‘Corinna Maynard will be all right presently,’ she added. ‘She’s evidently subject to hysterics, and the best way to deal with hysterical persons is to shut them in a room and leave them alone until they get over the attack. The Head Mistress had taken charge of her. When you see her again, don’t ask her anything about it, don’t say anything to her. She cannot be very well, and a sudden rush of blood to the head, perhaps through turning rather sharply, brought on the attack. Enid Lomax, you were about to translate for us from where Rhoda Walker left off. Have you got the place?’

‘Yes, Miss Fenwick,’ softly replied Enid.

And with her face its normal colour once more, she translated the French words with an ease which filled all her classmates with astonished admiration and made them temporarily forget Corinna’s indisposition.

CHAPTER III

WHAT HAPPENED AT THE POST OFFICE

CORINNA MAYNARD did not return to the classroom during the remainder of first school, and she did not appear in the playground during 'Break.' She was in her place, however, when they all went into class once more for second or mathematical school. She looked very self-conscious and distressed, seemed flustered, and kept alternately turning pale and colouring up, as her fellow-Fourths, who glanced at her slyly from time to time, could not help noticing. But Miss Fenwick did not call upon her in any way, left her to herself, and so nothing further occurred.

When the four o'clock bell rang, and the girls were quitting the classroom, Corinna went up to Miss Fenwick and whispered something.

'Certainly, Corinna, but you must take two other girls with you. The Head Mistress does not allow a girl out of gate alone.'

The Form-mistress did not speak in a loud tone, but the words reached the ear of Enid Lomax, who, with others, had not yet left the classroom, and was covertly watching Corinna.

It was a 'pass-out of gate,' or exeat, as it was called, that Corinna had asked of Miss Fenwick, so that she might go to the village and make some purchase. The Form-mistress scribbled the required permission for her and two others to go beyond the

school boundaries, and she went off in haste to persuade Myra Loder and Lottie Parkinson to accompany her.

As soon as she was gone, Enid Lomax approached Miss Fenwick, and also asked for a pass-out, explaining that she wanted to buy a book of postage stamps. The mistress gave her a similar answer to Corinna and wrote out another slip; and, equipped with it, Enid hurried off to find her two studymates.

'Florry—Clara,' she panted, when she overtook the pair on the stairs, 'I have got a pass-out for three of us from Miss Fenwick. I want to get a book of stamps at the post-office. Will you two come with me?'

Would they not? They were only too glad of the little outing.

The three set off straightway for the village, which was a fishing one on the coast. When they reached the post office there, all three of them went in, and Enid bought her book of stamps and then asked for a letter-card.

'Excuse me a couple of minutes, Florry—Clara,' she said to her chums, 'I want to dash off a few lines to my mother. I won't keep you very long.'

'That's all right,' Florry answered; and she and Clara Huntley amused themselves by looking through the post-office directory while Enid went to one of the little compartments reserved for writing telegrams. There, using her fountain pen, the new girl hastily wrote a brief message on the letter-card.

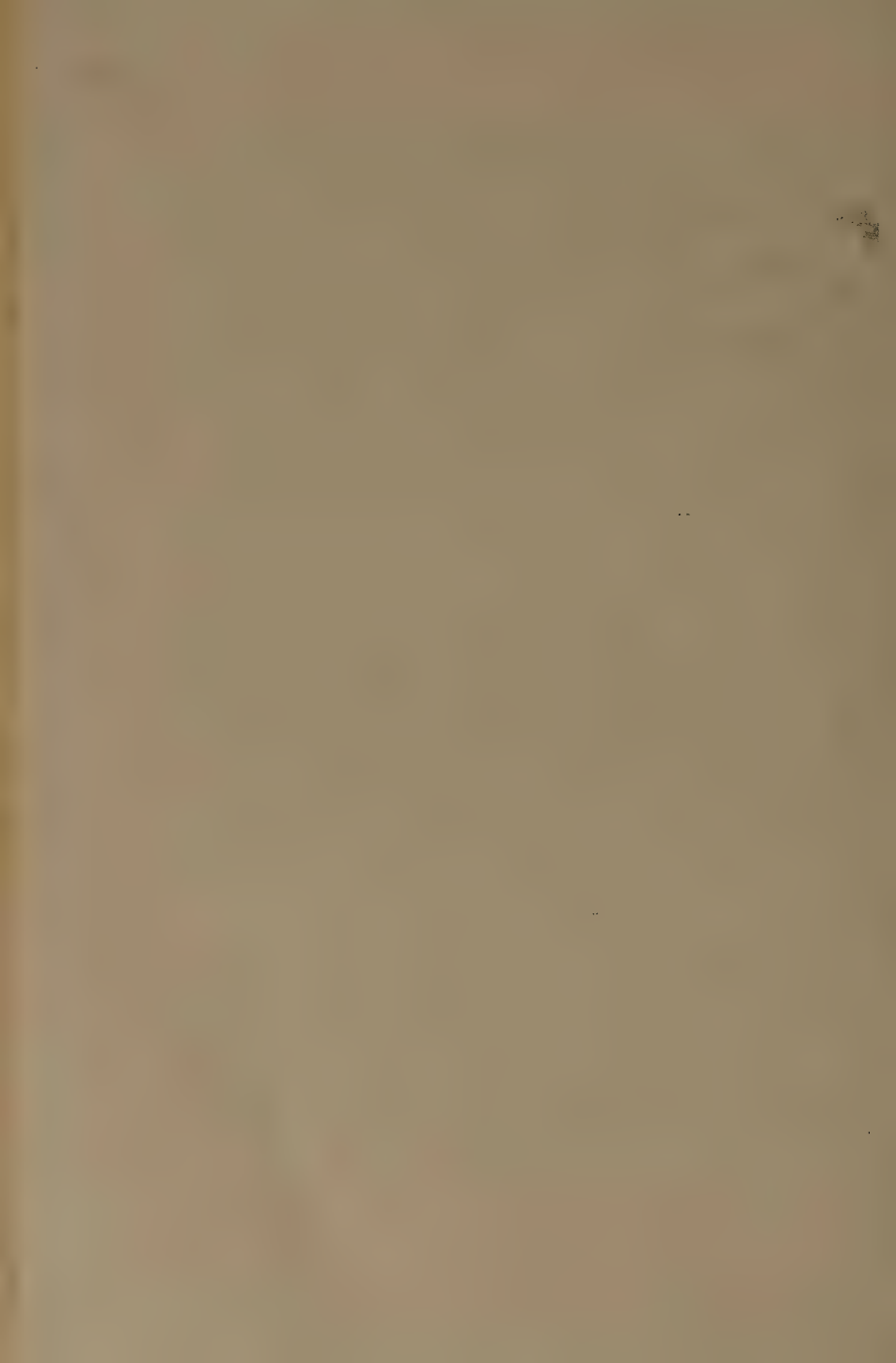
She had evidently everything just 'pat' in her mind that she wanted to say to her mother, for she wrote without a pause; and the ink of the beginning of the note was not dry when she signed her name. Just as she was finishing, Corinna Maynard entered



'She emerged from the telephone-box and picked up the sheet of blotting paper.'

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the post office. Myra Loder and Lottie Parkinson, who had accompanied her, had said they would wait outside.

Corinna caught sight at once of her three fellow-Fourths and hung back for the moment—seemed inclined to retreat. But as she saw Enid hurriedly blot the letter-card and then turn it over to write the address or superscription, a cunning look shot from her small, close-set eyes, and, quick as thought, she slipped inside the telephone-box just beside her, and shut the door.

She did not switch on the electric light, or touch the telephone, but waited in her hiding-place until Enid rejoined Florry and Clara, and the three went out of the post office. Then she emerged from the telephone-box, fairly flew to the same telegram-compartment as Enid had used, and picked up the sheet of blotting-paper lying upon the ledge. She had been quick to note when Enid blotted the letter-card upon it, that it was an almost clean sheet, and to her supreme elation she found, just as she had hoped and expected, the entire contents of the letter-card plainly imprinted on it. The superscription lay as boldly depicted, alongside the message.

But, of course, it was impossible to read either impression without holding it in front of a looking-glass.

Making sure by a sharp glance around that she was unobserved, Corinna folded up the sheet of blotting-paper and slipped it inside her handbag. Then, with a flushed face but a highly exultant look, she went back inside the telephone-box, shut the door again, and this time switched on the electric light. Opening her handbag, she drew out the sheet of blotting-paper, and held the impression of Enid's

letter-card in front of the mirror, attached to the inside of her bag.

She was thus able to read not only what her fellow-Fourth had written inside the card, but also the address or superscription on its outside.

Once more quitting the telephone-box, she went back to the telegram compartment; but she did not replace the sheet of blotting-paper on the ledge. She had folded this up into smaller compass and put it inside an unsealed letter she had taken from her bag. Drawing forth the letter from the envelope, but leaving the blotting paper within, she took up the pen lying beside her, dipped it in the inkwell before her, and added a postscript to the letter.

She then put this back, beside the folded blotting-paper, in the envelope, sealed the flap of the latter, and went to the counter and purchased a three-half-penny stamp.

'You were a long time,' said Lottie Parkinson, when she rejoined her studymates outside the post-office.

'Was I? I was kept waiting,' she untruthfully answered, as she dropped the letter into the pillar-box.

'Did you see Enid Lomax, Florry Mitchell, and Clara Huntley inside?' asked Myra. 'They came out just after you went in.'

'Yes, I saw them, but I didn't speak to them; and I don't think they saw me.'

The next day, Friday, passed uneventfully; but on the Saturday morning while all the girls were in the playground for 'Break,' Dorothy Baxter, another Fourth-former, came running up to Corinna, who was standing as usual sourly watching Enid Lomax, Florry Mitchell, and others playing net-ball.

'Corinna Maynard, the Head wants you in her office. Miss Fenwick told me to tell you.'

'Whatever for?' gasped Corinna. Her face went very white, and she reeled a little.

'She looked awfully scared,' Dorothy said later to some of the others.

'Oh, your mother has called, and has asked to see you, you scared ninny. That's all! Nothing to be alarmed about.'

Immensely relieved, apparently, Corinna hurried off to the school building; and she did not turn up in second school until the hour was nearly over. She explained to Miss Fenwick that the Head had given her permission to walk round the grounds with her mother.

When the bell rang at noon, and the girls were going along the corridor outside, Corinna raced in front of them and stopped them all by facing about and spreading her arms wide.

'One moment, all of you!' she called out, so that every one of them might hear her, 'what do you say to all of us having a game of "Hares and Hounds" this afternoon? As Enid Lomax and I are the newest girls in the Form, I propose that she and I be the Hares and the rest of you the Hounds, that is such of you as haven't any other arrangement on the board.'

Needless perhaps to say, they were all mightily surprised at her action and words, considering how unsociable and even cross-grained she had hitherto been. Now this was sporty and looked as if a change for the better had come over her.

CHAPTER IV

THE MISSING 'HARES'

I THINK it is a ripping idea,' loyally exclaimed Myra Loder, as in honour bound, being Corinna's studymate and invariable defender. 'I'm willing to be one of the Hounds.'

'And I,' cried Lottie Parkinson, as astonished as anybody else of course but agreeable to meeting Corinna half way in any overture of real comradeship.

'Same here,' said Florry Mitchell, who was something of a leader among her classmates. 'What do you say, Enid? Will you be a Hare with Corinna Maynard?'

Enid Lomax did not answer right away. She looked keenly and suspiciously at Corinna, who appeared anything but comfortable under her gaze.

'Yes,' she made reply at length, 'I'm willing to be a Hare with you, Corinna Maynard. But I don't know the country round here at all. Do you?'

'Oh, I've planned out the route we'll take from a map I have of the neighbourhood. We'll take the map with us, and also a pocket compass, and we've tongues in our heads to ask the way if we lose our bearings at all.'

The whole Fourth were now listening; and as only two or three of them had made any arrangement for the half holiday, the majority hailed the proposal that they should have the game of 'Hares and

Hounds' with acclamation. All, however, as already stated, were very much astonished that Corinna Maynard, who was such a stand-offish, aloof 'juggins,' should not only suggest the sport but also that she and the other new girl should be the Hares. It was unanimously agreed there and then that Corinna and Enid, as the Hares, should start out immediately after dinner, which would be over by one o'clock, and the 'pack' of hounds should follow the trail ten minutes later.

Florry Mitchell was to be the captain or leader of the pack, and Esmée Brookes, the 'whipper-in,' who brings up the rear.

Enid Lomax did not see anything of Corinna again until they all went in to dinner; then she came up and said:

'Lottie Parkinson has the two satchels ready with the scrap-paper, so we can set off on our run without any loss of time, when we leave hall. I'm glad to see you've all changed into your gym. things, the same as Myra, Lottie, and I.'

Enid simply nodded, but when Corinna had gone off to her place, Florry Mitchell whispered:

'She's coming out of her shell properly. Who would have expected this? You and she ought to be quite chummy after your run together this afternoon.'

Again Enid merely nodded, then looked rather thoughtful.

Dinner over, Corinna, Myra, and Lottie came up to Enid and her companions, and positively rushed them all to the gymnasium, from which the start was to be made. Esmée Brookes, as 'whipper-in,' set about collecting the rest of the 'pack'; and within five more minutes the two Hares, with their bags of

torn-up bits of paper slung over the shoulder, set off at a trot through the side gate.

'We'll make for the cliffs this side of Singleton Bay,' Corinna was heard to whisper, as they went out the gate, by three little First Formers standing there.

Ten minutes afterwards, the pair being out of sight, the Hounds started in chase, Florry Mitchell as captain leading and spying out the trail of paper, followed in single file by Clara Huntley, Myra Loder, Lottie Parkinson, Eleanor Hawes, and the rest of them. The 'scent' doubled and twisted continually; but there was always a sufficient amount of it scattered to be plainly visible, and the Hounds tracked unerringly until they came to a small but rather dense wood, known as Shellcove Coppice, growing upon the tops of the cliffs on the school side of one of the little landlocked coves, which were such a feature of that part of the coast.

Here the captain was at fault. She could no longer see any trail, and so she blew her whistle, to call a halt. The whipper-in took up her post where the scent was broken, and all the others hunted round in a wide circle to discover the lost trail. But though they searched around closely, covering every foot of ground within the coppice and to a considerable radius around it, they could not find any more 'scent.'

Florry Mitchell, Clara Huntley, Myra Loder, and one or two more who went along the very edge of the cliffs at the spot, saw a small but handsome steam pleasure-yacht lying at anchor in the middle of the cove, with three gentlemen in yachting attire lounging on the after-deck.

Completely baffled, Florry and those with her

returned to the whipper-in, and the whistle was sounded again for all the Hounds to come in. None had found the lost trail, so they held a consultation as to what they should do next.

‘Perhaps the “scent” has given out,’ said Eleanor Hawes, ‘and if so by the rules of the game, as you know, the Hares are considered caught and we are justified in chucking up the game.’

‘That’s so, but then Corinna and Enid may not know that rule,’ said Florry Mitchell.

‘I’m sure the “scent” can’t have given out,’ exclaimed Lottie Parkinson. ‘Corinna and I tore up no end of paper. It can’t be all exhausted.’

They quested round once more to a still wider circuit, but to no purpose, and then called out all together, in the well-known singsong, ‘Hares, come in. We’re not a-playing,’ in the belief that the pair might be in hiding close by and enjoying their discomfiture.

But no reply was made. Corinna and Enid did not appear; and at last in some dudgeon at what they considered unfair tactics on the part of the Hares in not scattering sufficient ‘scent,’ the ‘pack’ reluctantly decided to return to the school.

‘I expect they are back long ago,’ said Esmée Brookes, the whipper-in, as they started back, ‘but it’s not playing the game at all. They ought to have left some clue—carried on with the “scent,” after a reasonable while, at any rate. How otherwise could they expect us to find them?’

Somewhat to the surprise of the ‘pack,’ when it reached the school, Corinna and Enid were not there. But no concern was felt on that account. They had a map of the district and a pocket-compass with them, and, moreover, could ask their way if they

had lost it. The disgruntled 'pack' went off and started a game of net-ball, nine a-side, the two girls who were over acting as umpires.

Half-past five came, and the bell rang for tea and Call-over. Then, to the alarm of the entire Form, it was found that the two Hares had not yet come in.

'Something may have happened to them,' said Myra Loder, in deep concern. 'Something must have happened, or they'd have been back by now. I think some of us ought to go and tell Miss Fenwick.'

Florry Mitchell went with her; and the Form-mistress looked rather straight down her nose when they explained matters. She said nothing, however, but went off to inform the Head Mistress.

The register was called, and the pair were marked down as absent, without any comment being made by the mistress taking the names, and they all went in to tea. After the meal, though, Miss Fenwick assembled her Form, and said:

'Miss Gardner and I are rather concerned at Corinna Maynard's and Enid Lomax's prolonged absence, particularly as both of them are new girls and unacquainted with the neighbourhood. The Head Mistress thinks it would be as well if we instituted a search for them, in the circumstances. There is no saying what may have befallen them—what accident they may both have met with. I am going to ask all the seniors to help us in the search—as well as some of the other mistresses.'

Some of the Sixth and Fifth Formers were rather annoyed at being called on to turn out on such a hunt; but the growing belief that the two missing girls must have met with some serious accident—the fear that they might have been run over and killed, or have fallen down some pit, quarry, or cliff—filled

their classmates with such anxiety that they all readily enough engaged in the quest.

Under several of the Form-mistresses, including Miss Fenwick, the three upper classes therefore proceeded in a body to Shellcove Coppice, where the paper 'scent' had ended; and there, dividing into half a dozen parties, they began the search in as many different directions. They all struck away at tangents from the spot, arranging to meet at it again in an hour's time and compare notes.

Florry Mitchell, Clara Huntley, Myra Loder, Lottie Parkinson, Esmée Brookes, and Eleanor Hawes accompanied Miss Fenwick, who had also in her party two Sixth Form prefects, named Bella Burnett and Molly Price, and four Fifth Formers. Miss Fenwick had elected to follow the line of cliffs as far as the fishing village of Singleton, on the little bay of the same name.

When she and those with her came out upon the cliff-edge, some of them looked one way and some the other, peering anxiously over, dreading to discover the two girls fallen down the crags. Then the mistress espied the steam yacht lying at anchor, and at the same time noticed three old fishermen just landing from a large rowboat at the foot of a path which ascended the cliff-face a short distance from where she stood.

'We will go down the path there and ask those three fishermen whether they have seen anything of the missing girls,' she said. 'If they have not, the gentlemen on the yacht yonder may have noticed the pair passing along the cliffs, and I will pay the fishermen to row us out to inquire.'

CHAPTER V

AN ASTOUNDING IMPOSTURE

THEY all went down the cliff-path to the beach, and Miss Fenwick spoke to the three fishermen. No, they had not seen two girls with satchels on their backs, but then they had been out fishing all the afternoon. Yes, they were willing to take the Form-mistress and her charges to the yacht, to ask the three gentlemen aboard whether they had observed the missing girls.

The boat held them all quite comfortably; and the fishermen rowed them out to the yacht, which had an accommodation-ladder slung over its side. The fishermen said she was the *Wavelet*, owned by a wealthy London lady, whose name they did not know. She had put in there only that morning.

Seeing the boat making for their craft, the three yachtsmen, who were taking their ease in deck-chairs, jumped to their feet and came to the gangway, in evident surprise or curiosity at the visit. There were no other members of the crew in sight.

When close to the accommodation-ladder, Miss Fenwick called out:

‘There are two young ladies missing from the school near here, to which we belong. Did any one of you gentlemen notice two girls going along the cliffs at any time this afternoon?’

The three yachtsmen were all middle-aged men, and evidently not common sailors, if they had not quite the appearance of men of superior position in life.

‘No, ma’am, we can’t say that we did,’ one of the trio called back.

The boat’s nose was almost touching the accommodation-ladder, and the words were hardly off his lips, when a girl’s voice rang out shrilly through an open window in the deckhouse just behind him:

‘Miss Fenwick, we are here! I am here, a prisoner, with my mother, inside this yacht—in the hands of base impostors and tricksters.’

The voice was unmistakably that of Enid Lomax, although most high-pitched and vibrant with indignant anger.

For a moment all in the boat were as if thunder-struck. The three yachtsmen looked at one another, confounded and dismayed, and seemed not to know what to say or do. The fishermen were the first to recover from their surprise. With swift nods to one another, they dipped their oars again smartly and ran the boat alongside the accommodation-ladder.

One of them promptly grasped its guide-rope, letting his oar swing in the rowlock, and, jumping to his feet, held out a hand to Miss Fenwick. She was as quick-witted as he, and, taking his hand, sprang from her seat in the stern-sheets and stepped on to the ladder.

‘What does this mean?’ she demanded of the three disconcerted yachtsmen, who seemed to be scared out of their wits. ‘Release those two girls instantly, or it will be the worse for you! Did I understand her to say, girls, that her mother was a prisoner with her?’

‘Yes, Miss Fenwick,’ nearly all the amazed girls answered in a breath.

‘It is all a mistake, ma’am,’ one of the yachtsmen

then stammered. 'I—I will call my sister, Mrs. Maynard, the owner of this yacht. She will explain matters to your entire satisfaction, I am sure. Corinna is my niece, and the niece of these other two gentlemen. We are her mother's brothers. Miss Enid Lomax is here as our guest, with—with her mother.'

The Form-mistress and all the girls in the boat stared more wide-eyed than ever at this. Whatever did it all mean? they asked themselves in silent wonderment.

Before Miss Fenwick could collect her thoughts sufficiently to say anything more, however, the door of the deckhouse was thrown open, and Mrs. Maynard, Corinna's mother—whom the Form-mistress had seen at the school—stepped forth. That lady was followed by Enid Lomax, looking very heated and indignant, then by a lady so strikingly like Enid all were satisfied she must be the girl's mother, and finally by Corinna!

Mrs. Lomax, Enid's mother, was pale and distressed-looking; Corinna was paler still, and looked on the verge of a nervous breakdown or another collapse such as she had in class on the Thursday.

'It is as my brother said—all a sad mistake, madam,' Mrs. Maynard called out in a shaken voice and alternately paling and reddening, while she kept her eyes roving from Enid to Mrs. Lomax and back again. 'I can explain matters, however, to your complete satisfaction. Mrs. Lomax here came a trip with me in my yacht, and, chancing to meet her daughter out with Corinna this afternoon, we—I invited them both aboard. That is all! Good-evening, Mrs. Lomax! Good-evening, Enid! I will

not detain either of you longer in the circumstances.'

Miss Fenwick and her companions stood or sat dumbfounded, sensing that Mrs. Maynard was not telling the truth but too bewildered to know what to think. The three yachtsmen, Corinna's uncles, kept their eyes fixed on the deck, looking exceedingly ill at ease.

Giving Mrs. Maynard a withering look, but without a word to her or Corinna, Enid Lomax took her mother by the hand and drew her towards the gangway.

'Can you take us in the boat?' Mrs. Lomax asked Miss Fenwick.

'Yes, but—but is Corinna not coming?' articulated the Form-mistress, wholly mystified.

'It is better that she should remain where she is, Miss Fenwick,' cried Enid, with flashing eyes. 'She and her mother are both vile impostors. They have no right whatever to the name of Maynard, which is really my name and my mother's. I am the true Corinna Maynard, and my mother is the real Mrs. Maynard! That woman whom you have known as Mrs. Maynard is really my mother's private secretary and companion, Mrs. Standforth, who was supposed by everybody to be drowned in the wreck of the *Norman Prince*. And Corinna is not her daughter at all, but her niece—that man's daughter,' pointing to one of the three yachtsmen. 'Her proper name is Phoebe Dopping, just as my full name is Corinna Enid Lomax Maynard.'

Had a bombshell burst near them, the Form-mistress and the others from Eastongirt School could not have been more flabbergasted; they were speechless from bewilderment. Affording them no time to recover from her astounding disclosure, Enid

hurried her mother down the accommodation-ladder and into the boat, her mother then saying in a low, deeply-distressed voice to the three fishermen:

‘To the shore as quickly as you can, men, and I will give each of you ten pounds if you will promise not to tell any one of what you have seen and heard this evening, unless I should ask you to do so.’

As stupefied apparently as everybody else, the fishermen pushed off from the yacht’s side, and, bending to their oars, made the heavily-laden boat fairly fly towards the shore. Corinna, or Phoebe Dopping, had run back inside the deckhouse out of sight, and her aunt turned upon her father and her uncles, crying pettishly:

‘Why are you three standing there like fools, when you know the game is up? To the engines! We must get away at once. To the engines, Percy and Bert, and start them! Good thing you have steam up! Jasper, you slip the anchor, take the wheel, and get us out of here.’

‘What my daughter has told you, Miss Fenwick, is the simple truth, astounding as it may be to you,’ said Enid’s mother. ‘Good-bye, Mrs. Standforth!’ she called out, in a voice more laden with grief than anger. ‘I advise you and your brothers to put as wide a distance between us as you can. I will spare you—not prosecute—on condition you betake yourselves without delay to parts unknown. I shall be content with the knowledge that the bitterness of your defeat must be as gall and wormwood to you, madam.’

The amazing business was known before supper-time to all the seniors and Fourth Form girls at Eastongirt, but they were particularly asked by the

Head Mistress and the real Mrs. Maynard not to let it be known in the Lower School or to any one outside the school.

It appeared that Enid and her mother had been picked up the morning after the wreck, with one or two other passengers and members of the crew by a tramp steamer, after they had been drifting about all night in a boat which had lost all its oars through capsizing when first launched. The 'tramp' was named the *Minevia*, and was bound for Callao, in Peru, on the west side of South America; and across the whole width of the great Pacific Ocean and into that port they were taken. The *Minevia* was not equipped with wireless, and had simply come across their boat by mere chance, far from the scene of the wreck.

Somewhat to her surprise, Mrs. Maynard saw it reported in all the newspapers at Callao that she and Enid had been saved by the *Gortby*, the vessel which ran into the liner, and that they were at Hobart, in Tasmania. She naturally concluded, however, that later editions of the papers would contradict that report, and so she did not consider it necessary to do so herself, especially as she and Enid took the first boat sailing for New Zealand. On reaching there, she went to her bankers, of course, and learned to her utter stupefaction that a cablegram had been received some time before by them, purporting to come from her in Hobart. The cablegram had asked for a fresh letter of credit to be sent, as the original letter had gone down in the wreck; and the bank had complied with the request.

Satisfied that the woman personating her in Hobart must be Mrs. Standforth, her secretary and companion, who she knew had a niece and three

brothers in Hobart, and loth to denounce the impostor to the police, as she was sure Mrs. Standforth believed her and Enid to be drowned, she bade her bankers keep silent and honour the letter of credit so fraudulently obtained until they heard from herself again. She and Enid then proceeded to Hobart, travelling under her maiden name of Lomax, which was one of the names given to Enid in baptism. At Hobart, by discreet inquiries, Mrs. Maynard learned that a 'Mrs. Maynard,' answering in appearance to Mrs. Standforth, had sailed some months previously for England with her daughter, Corinna.

That the latter was the impostor's niece, Phoebe Dopping, Mrs. Maynard and Enid were equally as convinced, but even then they did not want to prosecute, Mrs. Maynard having rather liked Mrs. Standforth, and Enid pitying Phoebe, whom she had never seen and who had never seen her.

Following the two impostors to England—touching at Colombo, Ceylon, en route—Mrs. Maynard and Enid, or the true Corinna, learned by more discreet inquiries that Mrs. Standforth had placed her niece at Eastongirt under the name of 'Corinna Maynard,' and that she was accompanied by her three brothers. The letter of credit put plenty of money at the disposal of the impostor, who had bought the pleasure yacht, *Wavelet*, intending to enjoy herself as a lady of great wealth with her brothers, one of whom had been a marine engineer and the others ships' officers at Hobart.

Phoebe would have preferred not to go to the school, but to have enjoyed life like her supposed mother on the yacht and elsewhere, but it was absolutely necessary that she should become an

inmate of Eastongirt, as it was to place the real Corinna there that Mrs. Maynard was coming to England. Still anxious to avoid police proceedings, Mrs. Maynard placed Enid at the school, intending then to call on the impostor in London and confound her, but to spare both her and her niece on condition they went to America.

The false Corinna's amazement and terror can be well understood, therefore, when she heard the name of 'Enid Lomax' called out by her Form-mistress, for she knew the real Corinna's full name was Corinna Enid Lomax Maynard. What was her utter horror, on turning to look at the new girl with the startling name to recognize the girl she was personating, from photographs she had seen in the possession of her aunt!

The reader will not need any explanation of what took place in the post office. We need only say that, of course, Phoebe's letter, containing the sheet of blotting paper with instructions to hold it in front of a mirror, informed her aunt that Mrs. Maynard and Enid were alive and in England. Thus Mrs. Standforth was prepared for her former employer's call upon her. She contrived, with the aid of her three brothers, to kidnap Mrs. Maynard and smuggle her, bound and gagged, aboard the *Wavelet*, which promptly steamed round the coast to Shellcove.

Mrs. Standforth then called at the school to see Phoebe, and told the girl to suggest the game of 'Hares and Hounds' to her classmates, and that she and Enid should be the Hares, so as to inveigle the real Corinna to the vicinity of the cove. Mrs. Standforth herself and two of her brothers were waiting in the coppice, and they seized Enid,

temporarily gagging her, and carried her also aboard the yacht, Phoebe of course accompanying them.

It was Mrs. Standforth's intention to terrorize Mrs. Maynard into giving her a cheque for £25,000. Mrs. Maynard refused to give her more than £200 in all; and when Miss Fenwick and the others in the fishermen's boat were seen approaching the yacht, Mrs. Standforth in desperation threatened to shoot Enid and her mother if they did not hold their tongues and let the search-party depart in ignorance of their whereabouts.

Enid, however, was a brave girl, and believed that the impostor would not dare to fulfil her threat, and so called out at the top of her voice at the crucial moment, thus compelling their captor to let them go.

The affair was kept not only out of the Press, but also from the ears of the police, as Mrs. Maynard had no wish to have her name brought before the public in such a manner, and in her kindheartedness she pitied the impostor. Mrs. Standforth and her brothers and niece fled in the yacht to France, where they abandoned the vessel and cleared out to parts unknown. What became of the false Corinna Maynard no one can tell, for none of them was ever heard of more.

Corinna Enid Lomax Maynard, the real Corinna, remained at Eastongirt, but always passed amongst her schoolfellows as 'Enid Lomax' to prevent the juniors asking awkward questions or anything leaking out in other ways.

THE adventures of three girls
in South Australia.

BLINDED TRAILS

By Mona F. Young.

CHAPTER I

A STARTLING DISCOVERY

A FOUR-WHEELED, covered wagon, drawn by two mettlesome horses, was rattling briskly along a lonely and evidently little-used trail, for it could hardly be called a road, at the 'back o' beyond,'—that is, to be more particular, in the heart of South Australia, close to the border of the trackless deserts stretching north and west, into Northern Territory and Western Australia respectively.

A bright-eyed girl of sixteen occupied the front seat beside the driver, who was a handsome, sun-tanned young man of twenty-five or twenty-seven years of age, dressed in holiday bush attire. Behind them were two girls of much the same age as the first.

The country they were traversing was almost on a par with the deserts already referred to—was of the wildest and most desolate description. There were no houses or even farm-lands within sight—nothing but rolling plains covered with rough, reedy mallee scrub, with patches here and there of mulga scrub in bloom, an occasional gum-tree, and open stretches of long-bladed grass.

'My father's death then lies at the door of these wretched sheep-stealers, whoever they are, whether bad whites or wild blacks, Henderson,' said the girl beside the driver in indignant tones, breaking a silence that had lasted some little time.

'Oh, I would hardly go so far as to say that, Miss Rose,' he replied, deprecatingly, giving one of the horses a touch up with the whip, just as they topped a rise and the ground sloped away before them in a gentle gradient.

'Of course his death lies at the door of those who have been stealing his sheep,' Rose Barton cried, more heatedly still. 'Had he not been following the trail of the thieves, trying to run them down and recover the flock, he would not have met with this fatal accident; so the thieves are undoubtedly to blame for it.'

Then, after a momentary pause, she added:

'How—how was it that dad and Mulson, the overseer, were by themselves when it happened—that none of you 'riders' or stockmen was with them?'

'Why, of course, Miss Rose, that's easily explained. We had all separated into parties of two, to try and pick up the lost trail. I was with Tom Welby when we heard the shot, and we rode at once for the spot and found your father lying dead, with only Mulson beside him. The overseer explained that they had dismounted and were leading their horses through the bush, which was very thick just there, and your father was leading the way, when his rifle suddenly went off. He dropped dead right in front of Mulson, who could only suppose that his rifle-trigger caught in a bush, and so had been pulled. . . .

'Your dad was killed by a bullet fired from his own gun at very close quarters, right enough. That was

easily shown. And so we carried him back to head station at once, and your aunt, Mrs. Wallace, sent me off to the township for a doctor, and of course the police, as well as to telegraph the sad tidings to you and your two cousins at your school in Bunyah.'

Phil Henderson, the young stock-rider, ceased speaking, and again there was a prolonged silence. Rose Barton appeared to be too overcome with grief at her father's sad end to say anything more for the time being, and her two cousins, Amy and Trixy Wallace, refrained from making any comment in their deep sympathy for her. The silence was unbroken for several minutes, save for the monotonous padding of the horses' hoofs on the sun-baked, grass-grown track and the whirr of the wagon wheels.

Then suddenly from a large eucalyptus or gum-tree they were passing came a succession of curious bubbling notes, as though someone hidden in the tree were striving desperately to restrain bursting into merriment. Any stranger to the Australian Bush would certainly have been justified in believing that someone was indulging in inexplicable mirth, for immediately after the bubbling notes came an explosion of the merriest laughter. 'Ha! ha! ha! ha!' rang out loudly and shrilly.

All four occupants of the waggon, however, had often heard that singular cachinnation before, and knew that the sounds emanated from nothing more or less than a bird—the quaint 'laughing jackass'—the largest specimen in the world of the kingfisher family. Nevertheless, all three girls, having been so long at school in Bunyah, and away from their station-home in the Bush, were somewhat startled for the moment.

But, as Phil Henderson afterwards said, there was no excuse for Aaron and Samuel, the two horses, born and bred in the Bush as they both were, to take fright and bolt, as they did.

Aaron shied wildly aside, almost at right angles to the trail, dragging Samuel with him and nearly overturning the waggon. Then both horses rose on their hind legs, pawed the air with their fore hoofs for an instant and, dropping to earth once more, sharply set off at a mad pace 'cross country, refusing to swerve back to the trail or pull up, although Phil Henderson strained his hardest on the reins and bawled: 'Whoa! Steady! Stop it, you silly cuckoos!'

Away across the rough wilderness the startled animals tore, the wagon jumping and jolting and rocking behind them, threatening at every other bump to topple over on one side with its living freight and thus be dragged along. The three girls did not lose their nerve; not one of them even screamed. They were true Bush-born girls, and they simply set their teeth hard and clung on to the sides or seats of the wagon, trusting to the driver's skill to avert a spill.

Yet Phil Henderson was a new hand at Springside, as their station-home was called, and none of the three girls had ever seen him before. He had been taken on, first as a temporary sheep-shearer and afterwards as a permanent 'rider' or stockman, shortly after they had gone back to school at the beginning of the last term. All three, however, had taken an instinctive liking to him, and felt that they could trust him in any difficulty on the road. He had met them with the wagon at the terminus of the railway line from Bunyah, to convey them the

rest of the distance, a good few miles—mostly through virgin Bush—to their home.

Rose Barton's Aunt Mattie, otherwise Mrs. Wallace, had acted as her father's housekeeper ever since her mother's death, which occurred when she was a little trot of two years of age; and she and her cousins, Amy and Trixy, had thus been brought up together and sent to the same high-class young ladies' school, St. Ursula's, at Bunyah. As we have said, the three girls were much of an age, Rose being only a month or so older than Amy, and there being a year's difference between the latter and Trixy. They got on better together than many sisters do.

Amy and Trixy's mother was Rose's paternal aunt, and had lost her husband, who had been a sheep-farmer near Bunyah, about the same time as her brother, Henry Barton, had lost his wife.

Through a tangled thicket of mallee scrub, the frightened horses, Aaron and Samuel, dragged the wagon, then up a small bare rise, and through a clump of mulga scrub just beyond, scattering the delicate blossoms in showers around. But just as it seemed inevitable that they must crash into a lofty gum-tree topping a steep bank up which they were lumbering, Phil Henderson's strong arms and the sharp grade of the acclivity, combined, brought the animals to a standstill.

'Well done, Henderson!' cried Rose Barton. 'You've stopped them just in the nick of time. We'd have collided with that big gum up there, if you hadn't. I was just about to tell my cousins to drop off at the back, and was getting ready to jump for it myself.'

'You've got to thank this steep bank as much as me, young ladies,' answered the stock-rider, modestly

enough. 'It took the "go" out of the silly brutes. I am ashamed of you, Aaron and Samuel, really ashamed of you! To get jumpy and bolt like that, as if you had never heard a laughing jackass before, either of you.'

The two horses seemed to know what he said, for they drooped their heads and turned their eyes upon each other, as if mutually agreeing that they had acted very foolishly, and might well be ashamed of themselves.

'They are both all right now, young ladies. They'll act properly the rest of the way, I think I can safely promise you. They were a bit fresh when we started out; I'll make that excuse for them. Many another driver would give them a jolly good lambasting for so nearly wrecking us and risking our necks, but I'm not that sort. I make allowances for skittishness; a lambasting would do them no good, and you can see they're sorry now and as good as saying, "They'll not do the like again." Besides, I don't forget that they're not my horses, to do with what I like, but my employer's—yours now, miss.'

'And you might have added that "the merciful man is always merciful to his beast,"' panted Rose. 'I think all the more of you, Henderson, for not losing your temper with them.'

'Same here,' observed Amy, also rather breathlessly, 'and I think that when a man beats a horse for bolting it is as often as not in spiteful anger for the funk he has been in himself.'

'Quite so,' nodded Trixy, adding, with a smile, 'and you needn't make any apology to us for Aaron and Samuel's behaviour. We know our Bush-bred nags, and knew they'd soon get over their scare if you handled them rightly, as you certainly did. But

we've shed your box, Rose. It dropped off half way up the first rise, and mine and Amy's were following suit just now, only we held on to them.'

Phil Henderson was turning the horses round—they were meek and docile once more, plainly enough—so as to return and recover Rose's box, when he stopped short in the act and stared hard at the ground some few yards from his side of the wagon—craned his neck to look keenly at some object there.

'A new-made sheep track!' he exclaimed, with a low whistle of surprised discovery and pointing with his whip. 'That can mean only one thing, young ladies—hereabouts, in the unclaimed Bush, yet not so very far from our boundary fence, especially seeing that all the tracks are pointing away from it, not towards Springside.'

Rose, Amy, and Trixy followed the direction of his gaze and pointed whip, and beheld a fairly wide track, of the unmistakable footprints of sheep, ascending the steep bank diagonally at the spot. And, as he said, all the footmarks pointed away from the station—pointed in the opposite direction to this.

CHAPTER II

THE SEARCH OF THE LANGDALE CLIFFS

‘**T**HAT trail can sure mean only one thing, young ladies,’ the stock-rider repeated, significantly, turning and looking at them now with indignant anger and pleased discovery strangely commingled in his face, in spite of the seeming contradictoriness of the feelings.

‘You mean that the sheep-stealers must have been at work again last night, and come this way?’ said Rose, in a low, tense tone.

‘Exactly, miss! The sheep that made those marks must have come from Springside, and they’re fresh prints—must have been made late last night or very early this morning, I should say. Hold the reins a moment, Miss Rose! The horses won’t bolt again.’

‘No, you take them, Amy.’

And Rose passed the reins on to her elder cousin, then sprang nimbly from the wagon to the young stockman’s wake. She followed him across to the sheep track, which she could now see came from the westward—the direction she and her companions were taking. Skirting the high, steep bank from westerly as far as she could see, and thus also running parallel with the road, the track turned aside and struck northward just there, where the bank was not quite so steep.

Looking northward, in the direction the sheep tracks then took—beyond the bank, which was a

natural formation caused by some upheaval of the ground at the spot in the long dead past—Rose could see a cluster of table-like hills or cliffs. They had been thrown up by nature probably at the same far-distant era as the bank, and somewhat resembled the mesas or table-mountains of Arizona and northern Mexico.

Rising abruptly and sheer from the level plain, with sides as perpendicular as the walls of a house, their flat, grassy tops were not to be reached by climbing anywhere, as she knew, although none of them was higher than three or four hundred feet. And they were all clustered or jumbled together in so higgledy-piggledy a fashion that the passes between them, as she also knew, formed a most tangled maze.

They stood, too, just on the border-line of the dreary, unfrequented deserts stretching away northward and westward into Northern Territory and Western Australia.

‘This is a lucky discovery, Miss Rose,’ said Phil Henderson. ‘As sure as anything some more sheep were stolen from this side of our “run” last night or early this morning, and—they’re hidden somewhere at the present moment among the Langdale Cliffs over there.’

And he pointed towards the table-like hills.

‘The thieves would never take them that way to sell them, as I need hardly tell you. The Cliffs don’t lie between here and any township. The nearest township is the one we last came through—Hitchwell—and the thieves would know better than to try to dispose of Springside-marked sheep there, or anywhere else round here, for that matter. Sure as anything, they have the sheep hidden in the depths

of the Cliffs and are waiting until nightfall to drive them farther. Like as not, the gang has its secret duffing-yard hidden somewhere among the Cliffs, and are even now faking the brands on the animals to prevent their being identified when they come to sell 'em.'

'You are right, Henderson! you are right,' exclaimed Rose, all excitement now. 'I feel sure you must be right in both your surmises. The thieves would not go on northward, seeing that nothing lies beyond those Cliffs, but waterless deserts for thousands of miles—unless, of course, they are wild blacks from Northern Territory, in which case they would naturally make back there.'

'No, miss, they were not wild blacks who drove off those sheep. They were mounted men. Look here, and look there!'

And he pointed to the prints of horses' hoofs close beside the tracks of the sheep.

'Let us hurry on at once to Springside, and rouse out all the hands,' cried Rose, on this evidence that either white men or semi-civilized blacks who rode horses were the depredators. 'We must also notify the police and our neighbours, the Binnings, at Sampson Downs, and have the Cliffs yonder surrounded as quickly as may be.'

'That's the ticket, Miss Rose! Back to the wagon! We'll lose no more time than we can help.'

The pair ran back to the wagon, and, while Rose told her cousins of their belief, Henderson drove to where her box lay, retrieved it—none the worse for its fall—and then took the road once more for Springside at the gallop.

Only some half-dozen more miles had they to go

before they reached a big gate on which was painted the word 'Springside.' Opening the gate, they drove, still at top speed, along the road crossing the 'run,' and, after another twenty minutes or so came in sight of the girls' home—Springside Head Station or 'Government House,' as it was called—a handsome, large, rambling two-storeyed building, with a veranda in front facing a well-kept lawn. To one side was a well-stocked flower-garden, literally a blaze of colour, and to the other was a big orchard, while behind the main building, separated from it by a kitchen-garden, partly hidden by trees, were the shearing-sheds and water-tanks, with the quarters for the hands.

Aunt Mattie, Amy's and Trixy's mother, came on to the veranda, her kind old face swollen and her eyes red with recent tears, as they drove up; and a big, rather coarse-looking white man, with a face the colour of mahogany from the sun, and clad in a cabbage-tree hat, open-necked check shirt, and riding breeches and high boots, advanced with a couple of half-castes and a full-blooded aboriginal or black stable-boy.

The half-castes and the black rushed to relieve Henderson of charge of the horses, and the white man, approaching the side of the wagon more slowly, called out:

'This is a sad home-coming for you, Miss Rose, but in the midst of life we are in death, as you must remember; and it must be some consolation to you to know that no man perhaps was better fitted to die so suddenly as your father.'

'I know that, Mulson,' responded Rose in a choked voice, 'and that is why I am trying not to grieve overmuch. I know that he has gone to his happy

reward in the next world. But—but,' fighting down her emotion, 'tell me were any of our sheep stolen last night or before daylight this morning.'

Mulson, the overseer, started violently and looked at her sharply—searchingly from under his shaggy brows, his eyes, which were rather small and close together, narrowing to needle-points.

'Why, yes, a smallish flock—a couple of hundred head—from the Pleasant Downs pasture,' he answered slowly. 'How did you know?' And he cast a quick, sidelong glance at Phil Henderson, who was in the act of handing over the reins to the black fellow. 'All the hands, except myself and these three stable-boys, are out now beating up their trail. I would have gone with them, but thought it best, as I could do no more than any one of them could, to stay behind in the circumstances, to receive you, Miss Rose, as my new employer. Besides, some one in authority had to remain behind in case of emergency. Your aunt is too upset to attend to anything beyond the house.'

'Phil Henderson will explain, Mulson,' returned Rose; and she hurried past him, with her cousins, apparently not noticing the hand he had diffidently extended to take hers.

The next moment she was sobbing her heart out nearly upon the motherly bosom of her father's sister, who alone seemed to know how to comfort her in her sad bereavement. Aunt Mattie drew her within the house, and Amy and Trixy sorrowfully followed them inside.

Phil Henderson in a few brief words acquainted Ezra Mulson with the momentous discovery he believed he had made, as regarded the missing flock of sheep.

'I shall bring all the hands back myself at once, and search the Langdale Cliffs inside out, if necessary,' said the overseer. 'You are not fit to go, Henderson, after your long drive from the railway station. You can remain in charge here, and put the horses and wagon away. Jackie Littlewood,' addressing the pure-blooded black fellow, 'you get a horse and ride your fastest to Sampson Downs, and tell whichever of the Mr. Binnings you see that I have word of the gang who are stealing their sheep and ours—have a good idea of where the rogues have some of our sheep hidden. You pidney (understand)?'

'Yohi, me pidney all right,' returned the black. 'Me yan (go) right 'way.'

'Wait, you fool! Tell whoever you see at Sampson Downs to send every man who can be spared to join us at the Langdale Cliffs. Their quickest way, of course, will be to cut across the strip of desert between their place and the Cliffs, but you need hardly tell them to go that way; they're bound to. Yet stay! perhaps you had better tell them to be sure to take that way, as by so doing they'll come up on the north side of the Cliffs and so cut off the escape of the rogues into the desert. You quite pidney now, Jackie?'

'Me pidney all right,' repeated the aboriginal.

'Then off you pop, and ride L for leather. Joe Hawkins!' turning to one of the two half-castes, who were shouldering Amy's and Rose's boxes respectively, 'you take another horse and ride your fastest to meet Williams and the police coming from Boola. I sent off Williams to fetch the troopers the moment I was informed of the theft of the sheep,' he explained to Henderson. 'You ought not to have to

go very far, Joe, before meeting them. Take them at once with you then to the Langdale Cliffs. Tell them what you heard Henderson tell me.'

'Right you are, boss.'

A few minutes later the overseer, Jackie Littlewood, and Joe Hawkins, all three, rode away in as many different directions, at the gallop. Not a quarter of an hour after they had departed, the last-mentioned was back with his fellow-hand, Tom Williams, and a squad of six mounted policemen from Boola township, under a sergeant.

Henderson confirmed what Hawkins had already told the sergeant, whose name was Gay—how he and his three young mistresses had come across the tracks of the missing sheep. And, without waiting to breathe their horses after their long and hard ride from Boola, the cavalcade dashed off along the road towards the Langdale Cliffs.

Rose and her aunt and cousins did not come out of the house until the police had galloped away.

'There's every hope now, ladies, of the sheep-stealing rascals being laid by the heels,' said Henderson. 'Sergeant Gay is almost bound to run 'em to earth this time, and I shan't begrudge him the feather it will be in his cap. He's had enough wildgoose chases, here, there, and everywhere, after the gang up to this to break any man's heart.'

But the young stock-rider's expressed hope was not realized. Just as he was going to the house to see Aunt Mattie or Rose for their instructions for the night, Joe Hawkins, the half-caste stable-boy, rode in, with a message from the overseer.

'The sheep-stealers are not cotched yet,' he told Phil, in a bitterly disappointed tone. 'They covered up their tracks and the tracks of the sheep somehow

amongst the Cliffs and we was all baffled. It's jus' as if they and the sheep tuk wings and flew, arter they got in 'mong them Cliffs, they've hidden their trail so. The cops and Mr. Mulson and our men and the Sampson Downs' crowd, under Mr. Ed. Binning, are all camping for the night in the passes through the Cliffs, hoping to pick up the trail again at dawn. If they don't, Mr. Mulson told me to tell you our lot 'ud return in time for the boss's funeral to-morrow.'

'You searched beyond the Langdale Cliffs, of course, Joe—all of you, I mean—tried the desert beyond them for tracks?' Phil Henderson asked, amazedly.

'Of course. We all hunted high an' low. Sergeant Gay and his cops, with the Sampson Downs lot, went some miles into the desert north'ard, and we of Springside s'arched round the hills toward Bunyah. But nary a track could any on us find nowhere.'

'Well, it beats me, Joe,' said Phil. 'I don't for the life of me see where the sheep-stealers can have got to from those Cliffs without leaving some trail; and if you all searched well among the Cliffs themselves, examined every pass and defile, they cannot possibly have their "duffing-yard" there.'

'We s'arched every pass and gully 'mong them Cliffs, and found jist nothink at all,' nodded the half-caste.

CHAPTER III

THE VANISHED STOCK-RIDER

PHIL HENDERSON reported the overseer's message to Rose, whom he found sitting over a late supper with her aunt and her cousins. But his young mistress's feelings had undergone a change since she had looked on the dead face of her father, that beloved parent who was to be consigned to his last resting-place on the following day. She no longer seemed to care whether the sheep-stealers were brought to justice or not, or any of the stolen sheep recovered.

What did either of those things matter in the face of her terrible bereavement? She was now an orphan, and the knowledge that she was the sole proprietress of one of the biggest sheep-rearing stations or farms in that part of South Australia filled her with anxiety, and even dismay.

'Oh, what am I to do without daddy?' she wailed, to her aunt.

'We will carry on just the same as if he were here to direct everything, my dear,' replied her matter-of-fact aunt. 'Have no fear! Mr. Mulson is a good overseer, your father thought highly of him, and under his management everything will be all right.'

Rose's father was buried next day, Rose herself, Aunt Mattie, and her cousins, as well as nearly all the station-hands, led by Ezra Mulson, driving or riding behind the coffin—carried on a wagon—to the little cemetery at Boola, and seeing the last sad

rites performed by the Rev. Mr. Steele, of that township. When they all returned home, Rose seemed to have made a more successful effort to throw off her gloom, and astonished even her aunt and cousins by the energetic way in which she set about attending to the business of the station.

‘I want everything to go on exactly as when my father was alive, Mulson,’ she said to the overseer. ‘You will report to me and consult with me on all matters. Although by the will my father left, my aunt is sole executrix of the estate and I am a minor, you are to regard me as your real mistress, the one in authority. That is my aunt’s wish, as she will inform you, as well as my own. I am going to send to Bunyah for a motor-car, and a chauffeur to drive it and to teach me how to, and thus I hope to be able to get about better than in the old-fashioned way, on horseback; though of course I will still ride at times. I mean to make a complete circuit of the “run” forthwith, and see for myself the arrangements everywhere.’

Mulson promised to carry out his duties as overseer as faithfully under her control as he had done under her father’s. And she was as good as her word, for the very day after the funeral she sent off an order to Bunyah for a big six-seater motor-car, as well as a request to the firm who were to supply it to furnish an expert chauffeur with it, and immediately afterwards rode off on horseback, in company with Amy and Trixy and Mulson, to one of the outlying pastures and back stations, to begin her tour of the entire ‘run’ or estate. This covered several thousand acres and was over eight miles across.

The efforts to recover the stolen sheep and round

up the mysterious gang who were intermittently raiding the flocks on Springside and its neighbouring station of Sampson Downs, owned by the two brothers, Binning—Edward and James—had failed, as they had failed before. Although the mounted police from both Boola and Hitchwell, under an inspector, had combed the maze of passes through the Langdale Cliffs, no further trace of the sheep taken into them had been found.

All the wild bush-country round, too, to a very wide area, had been scoured by the troopers, aided by parties of the stock-riders from the two and other stations, and even the arid, waterless desert north of the Cliffs had been penetrated to some distance, without the slightest clue to the disappearance of the missing animals or the men who had carried them off being discovered.

Police and station-hands alike agreed that it would be idle to look for either the thieves or the sheep very far within the dreary wastes northward, for if the gang were white men they could not exist there, and, if wild blacks, it would be like looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack. The fact that the thieves were mounted proved conclusively that they were either whites or semi-civilized blacks, and such would only take to the desert temporarily, in order to throw off pursuit—would return and emerge from its southern border at some greater or less distance from where they had entered.

A week or more had gone by, and Rose and her cousins were thoroughly enjoying the free, open-air life on the station, riding here, there, and everywhere together, now in the motor-car, driven by Parrett, the chauffeur, now on horseback, seeing that everything on the run was being conducted properly,

when late one night Phil Henderson rode up to the house with news from Mulson that a fresh raid had been made by the sheep-stealers.

‘They have carried off about two hundred ewes and lambs,’ he informed Rose. ‘It was at Wirra-Wirra Plain, where Dave Williams is stationed, as you know. The gang, half a dozen masked men, surprised him as he was returning to his hut at sundown, sprang suddenly upon him from ambush as he was entering the door, and left him tied up. It was I found him, miss. I was taking a ride round from the back station, just to see that things were all right, you understand, and I came upon the hoof-prints of the gang crossing the run. They hadn’t the sheep with them then; they were going to Williams’ hut. I followed their trail, and found Dave tied up.’

‘Was Williams hurt at all?’ Rose asked, anxiously.

‘No, miss. They hadn’t knocked him about at all, but if I hadn’t found their trail and followed it, he’d have probably lain tied up in his hut until morning. We counted the flock at once, and then I rode back full pelt to the back station and roused out Mr. Mulson and the hands there. He sent me on at once here to tell you. From the direction the gang took with the sheep, we believe they made for the desert at a point between our run and that of Mr. Binnings at Sampson Downs.’

‘They were masked, you say, and only half a dozen or so in number?’ said Rose. ‘Then they must be white men, as we thought before from their possessing horses. I presume Mr. Mulson has sent a man to inform the police, and another to get the assistance of the Brothers Binning?’

‘Yes, Miss Rose, he did both of those things, and he told me to remain at the house here to await his return. But I want to ask a favour of you, miss.’

Rose looked at him in some surprise.

‘Yes?’ she said interrogatively.

‘I have an idea, miss—what we hands would call a brain-wave,’ he went on. ‘I may be right, and I may be wrong, but I am willing to risk my life to verify my suspicion. It’s odd, now, miss, when you come to think of it, that that gang only carried off some two hundred ewes and fairly well-grown lambs, when they might have had the whole flock of seven or eight hundred sheep, seeing they had tied up the shepherd and there was no one else to hinder ’em.’

‘It is perhaps rather odd, now you mention it, Henderson. For half a dozen men on horseback could easily drive a much bigger flock, even without dogs to help them. But then, of course, if they have taken the sheep into the desert north of here—’

‘You may rest assured, miss, that they will only take them a short way into it, just to cover up their tracks, and will then circle round and come out somewhere along its border. I’m counting on that, but I don’t want you to ask me exactly what my idea is. What I want you to do, miss—the favour I am going to ask of you—is to give me leave of absence right away until morning—to let me ride off now on my lonesome, to put the idea I’ve got to the test. Have I your permission to go, Miss Rose?’

‘And I mustn’t ask you where you are going or what you are thinking of doing?’

‘No, miss, if you don’t mind.’

‘But you mustn’t risk your life in a single-handed encounter with these men, Henderson? You’ll

promise me not to do anything rash—not to run any unnecessary risks?’

‘I’ll promise you that, miss. The fact is I hope to locate the gang’s hiding-place. I’ll take every precaution not to be discovered by them or to fall foul of them. I’ll post back here at once if I discover anything.’

‘Very well, you may go, but be sure to take every care of yourself, Henderson. Good men are scarce, you know.’

With a hasty ‘Thanks, miss,’ he vaulted into the saddle—they had been talking beside his horse at the foot of the veranda steps—and, touching his hat, he was gone in a flash down the road leading to the main gate and to Hitchwell, past the Langdale Cliffs.

Aunt Mattie insisted on Rose and Amy and Trixy, the whole household, in fact, going to bed at the wonted hour, remarking that they could all get up if further news came from Mr. Mulson, and that probably none would until morning. Rose slept well and did not wake until shortly after daybreak, when one of the hands arrived with word from the overseer that once again the sheep-stealers had baffled their pursuers.

They had effectually blinded their trail immediately after entering the desert, and although Mulson and his companions had hunted round in a wide circle, it could not be picked up again. Consequently, leaving half a dozen men to search farther afield amid the burning waste of sand and scrub, the overseer had despatched half his remaining force along the borderline westward and followed it eastward himself, in the hope of discovering where the gang crossed back into more hospitable country.

The morning passed, midday came, and Phil

Henderson, the young stock-rider, had not returned. The afternoon also went by, and night fell again and he had not shown up. Then, just as the servants were thinking of locking up for the night, Mulson rode up to the house, accompanied by two or three of the hands, all looking done up, both they and their horses.

‘I followed the border-line of the desert eastward for thirty miles, Miss Rose,’ he reported, and then rode back along it, all of us in a line, of course, and widely separated, so as not to miss any trail coming out from it, but—no luck! And Metcalfe here was one of the party I sent to skirt the desert westward, and he reports that he and his mates had no success that way either. Absurd as it may seem, I’m inclined to believe that the gang has some secret hiding-place in the desert itself, some place where they have water, and pasture also for the sheep and their horses.’

‘Ah! Possibly that was Phil Henderson’s idea,’ said Rose, ‘and he didn’t care to explain, for fear I should laugh at him for entertaining such a wild notion; although at first I believed that he was going to lie in wait somewhere in the Langdale Cliffs, in the hope still that the gang had their hiding-place there.’

Mulson started violently.

‘What’s that, Miss Rose? What’s this about Henderson?’

Rose explained, and the overseer looked rather straight down his nose.

‘And he hasn’t come back? Miss Rose, I don’t like to cast suspicion upon any man, but this looks rather black where he is concerned, at least to my thinking.’

‘What do you mean? You think the gang may have killed him? Oh, institute a search for him at once then.’

‘I’ll certainly do that, miss; but I don’t think he is dead. If you ask me, I believe that he was in secret league with the gang, and that as sure as anything he has cleared off with it. He and his fellow-thieves had probably arranged that this was to be their last raid in these parts, and he only asked leave of absence from you so that he might depart and have all night and all to-day to get well away without exciting suspicion.’

‘Oh, how can you think so basely of him as that, Mr. Mulson? I feel sure he is an honest man, and that he hoped, as he said, to discover the gang’s whereabouts. Institute a search for him at once in case any ill has befallen him—try the Langdale Cliffs first, and then get the police to help you scour the desert to a considerable depth everywhere.’

‘I’ll do so at once, of course, Miss Rose, you may rely,’ replied Mulson. ‘In fact, I’ll have the whole countryside scoured in quest of them. But,’ shaking his head, ‘I’m sorely afraid that we’ll only have our trouble for nothing, and that you are wasting your sympathy on him. I believe that, as I said, he has cleared out for good and all, and we’ll never see him again; and for the reason I gave you.’

‘Oh, I won’t—I won’t believe so badly of him as that, Mulson.’

And Rose turned on her heel indignantly.

CHAPTER IV

THE LEDGE AND THE ROPE-LADDER

THREE days went by, and Phil Henderson, the stock-rider, had not returned, nor had any trace of him been discovered, although the mounted police and parties of stockmen from Springside and Sampson Downs searched the country in all directions, penetrating even, as Rose Barton suggested, to the extent of a day's hard ride into the northern desert, which consisted of hundreds, nay, thousands of square miles of nothing but barren and sandy ridges, burning hot under the tropical sun, and utterly destitute of anything but a coarse, dried-up vegetation—a region where neither civilized man nor horse nor sheep could find sustenance or survive for long.

Rose was loth to believe that Henderson was in league with the sheep-stealers, who also eluded all search; that he had gone off with them. She feared that he had fallen a victim to the gang; that he had surprised the ruffians somewhere, and that he had paid for his daring with his life; and she implored Inspector Warton and Mulson not to relax their efforts to find him.

The search was still being vigorously prosecuted, when she ordered out her motor-car and told Parrett, the chauffeur, to drive her and Amy and Trixy to the Langdale Cliffs.

'I still incline to the belief that it was amongst them Henderson hoped to discover some trace of the gang,' she said to her cousins. 'We will go there

this afternoon and have a look round. Not that I really hope to find any clue to his disappearance, as the passes have been already combed, as we know. But one never knows.'

'I certainly hope we shan't find his dead body,' said Amy.

The girls did not tell any one, even their aunt and mother, where they were going, and the afternoon was still young when Parrett whirled them up to the portal of the main pass through the cliffs.

'Drive through slowly, Parrett,' Rose ordered. 'And Amy and Trixy use your eyes well, as we go, to spot anything out of the ordinary.'

So into the jaws of the great gloomy pass they rolled, at a positive crawl. The floor or bottom was fairly clear of gibbers or boulders, fairly level, too, and wide enough for three cars to travel abreast or to pass one another. High above them towered the mighty cliffs on either hand, as straight and sheer practically as the walls of a house, broken here and there with tiny shelves or ledges, it is true, but upon which nothing larger than a bird could have hoped to perch.

The gorge or pass wound and twisted; and presently they came to where it forked, or rather to its end, for it was merely the space between two of the great table-like heights. Another similar hill was before them, and they had their choice of going round it, either to the right or to the left.

'Let's go to the left,' said Trixy, for no particular reason.

'Right-o! Turn to the left, Parrett,' ordered Rose.

This defile was equally as wide and level-floored as the other. They had traversed about half its length when they came to a narrow bay or indentation in

the right-hand cliff. All four of them hastily scanned the recess, and saw that at the height of about thirty feet there was a huge loose fragment of rock standing poised upon a ledge much wider than any they had yet noticed.

Evidently the fragment, which was about seven feet in height and ten in width, had become detached from the cliff-face at some time or another, and it looked as if at any moment it might roll from its precarious perch—come crashing down into the pass below.

‘Oh, let’s get by! That great piece of rock may fall upon us,’ gasped Trixy in horror.

‘Oh, it’s safe enough! It was loose like that when we came through here last, you and I, Amy, with—with poor old dad, don’t you remember?’ said Rose reassuringly.

And then a strange and startling thing happened.

The forms of two men suddenly uprose, locked together in a desperate scuffle, upon the very verge of the cliff-top at the back of the bay!

One grasped a revolver, which cracked out almost in the same instant as the girls and Parrett beheld the struggling figures.

The report of the shot was taken up by the rocks in the defile, which echoed and re-echoed it. Then both men fell amid the grass, and were hidden from the amazed, watching eyes below for about two seconds, when there came another muffled report of a shot, again echoed and re-echoed by the cliffs around.

‘Oh! oh! who can they be?’ grasped Trixy.

‘However did they get up there?’ panted Amy. ‘The cliffs are unclimbable everywhere, I have always understood, and——’

'One of them—not the man with the revolver—was Henderson, I am sure,' cried Rose, in wild excitement.

Simultaneously with her last word a solitary figure rose into sight upon the cliff-top, which could not have been less than three hundred feet above them. He waved an arm feebly, then staggered about, and, putting his hands to his mouth, bawled down:

'I am Henderson. I am wounded—the ruffian shot me in the shoulder—but I think I can get down to you. Wait there! Don't go away. I may be some little time getting down.'

He turned and reeled out of sight, and the girls and Parrett stared at one another.

'The gang must have had him a prisoner,' said the chauffeur. 'But where's the way up? It can't be hereabouts. It would take a thirty-foot ladder to reach even that ledge where the loose piece of rock is, and the cliff is quite sheer—actually overhangs in places above there.'

'He is wounded, he said,' cried Rose, in great anxiety now, and something like dismay. 'How can he ever hope to get down to us? If he has to slide down a rope, he is almost sure to lose his hold in his weakness and fall and be killed. Look about—look about for some place to get up.'

'He told us to wait here—not to go away,' said Amy. 'I don't see any way the best of climbers could get up or down the cliff here, but we had better wait and see what he intends doing.'

'I hope sincerely there are no more of the gang in the vicinity,' breathed Trixy, trembling violently. 'We haven't as much as a pistol amongst the four of us, unless you happen to have brought one unknown to us, Parrett.'

‘More’s the pity, Miss Trixy, I didn’t,’ replied the chauffeur, casting anxious glances both ways along the pass, rather than scanning the cliff for a way up.

They had all four alighted from the car, and were standing as close to the cliff facing the bay as they could, so as to be able to see the better any one who appeared on the top of this.

‘There can’t be any more of the gang within hearing or the reports of those two pistol-shots and the echoes they awoke, would have brought them, and Henderson wouldn’t have risked shouting to us, as he did,’ Rose said. ‘What has happened to the man we saw him struggling with? Did—did Henderson kill him, I wonder?’

‘Goodness knows, miss,’ said Parrett. ‘Henderson may have only stunned him, and may be busy binding his hands and feet. That is so, I should say, seeing he is so long in returning.’

And then they all four jumped—Trixy Wallace afterwards declared that she nearly jumped out of her skin—as a human figure suddenly appeared from behind the big loose boulder on the ledge upon the face of the cliff opposite.

It was Henderson, dragging something laboriously behind him and reeling with weakness—barely able to stand.

He made a desperate effort, heaving up what looked like a tangled mass of cordage and flinging it off the ledge. As it fell, it uncoiled itself and hung dangling from where he stood, to the very base of the cliff.

It was a rope-ladder!

Even as those below saw this, he swayed wildly, then sank in a limp heap upon the ledge.

‘Oh, quick, up the ladder with you, Parrett, to his help! He has fainted,’ cried Rose, and she herself

sprang towards the rope-ladder as if with the intention of mounting it.

‘I’ll go up, miss, and do what I can for him. Don’t you attempt the climb,’ said the chauffeur.

And, seizing the upright ropes, he stepped on to the rungs and diffidently began the ascent.

‘Help me hold the ladder and prevent it swaying, Amy—Trixy,’ cried Rose, and she hung on to the bottom rungs with all her weight, steadying it.

Then, as her cousins joined her and clung also to the ladder with all their strength, she said:

‘I don’t see how Parrett can hope to get him down without the help of one of us up on the ledge also. Henderson’s a big and heavy man, and Parrett’s only a small, weak man. I’m going up also, as soon as Parrett has reached the ledge. We may then be able to lower Henderson by tying him to the end of the ladder—getting it up first again and letting it down gently with him—or there may be a rope on the cliff-top we can use. I should say there’s almost bound to be.’

‘Oh, you’ll fall, Rose, if you attempt the climb,’ gasped Trixy.

‘No, I shan’t. I’ll cling on safely, never fear. Do you two hang on for all you are worth and keep it from swinging and jerking me off.’

All three girls were watching the chauffeur mounting the ladder. He ascended carefully but steadily, and at length they had the satisfaction of seeing him draw himself safely on to the ledge and disappear.

The next moment his head appeared, craning over, and he called down to them:

‘He is lying in a dead swoon. I don’t see how I am going to get him down. This end of the ladder is hooked on securely to two ring-bolts sunk in the

floor of the ledge, and there is a tunnel behind this loose rock here, concealed by it. I can see daylight through the tunnel, so that it can only be a yard or two through it. I'm going to see what lies beyond.'

He disappeared again, and Rose said:

'I'm going up as I said. Hang on to the ladder, both of you with all your strength.'

She stepped on to the rungs, or rather rat-lines, and fearlessly began the ascent, Amy and Trixy throwing their whole weight upon either upright rope to keep the contrivance steady.

'Oh, won't we just have the laugh of Mulson and all the hands,' said Amy.

'Yes, and of Sergeant Gay and his troopers, too,' laughed Rose.

'I could wish with all my heart, though,' said Trixy, 'that we were well out of this—with Henderson and Parrett, of course—that we were all safe back home. Suppose—suppose for a moment that others of the sheep-stealers—and there must be more in the gang—were to come and catch us here. Whatever would they do to us?'

'Don't let us think about it,' rejoined Amy, with a shiver.

'Oh, there's not much likelihood of any of them coming yet awhile,' Rose reassured them.

CHAPTER V

TRAPPED BY THE SHEEP-STEALERS

HOLDING tightly to the upright ropes and feeling carefully for the rungs with each foot in succession, Rose mounted higher and higher slowly but surely. She was about ten feet up when Parrett reappeared on the ledge.

‘Oh, do be careful, Miss Rose!’ he called down. ‘Come very slowly. Take your time, and for goodness sake don’t lose your hold or your nerve, if you turn giddy.’

‘I shan’t turn giddy,’ Rose answered him, cheerily. ‘Well, what else have you discovered? Have you found a rope we can lower him by?’

‘No, Miss Rose, but I should think we can find one when you get up. At the back of the short tunnel is a sloping passage, open to the sky, and leading up evidently on to the top of the hill. And just outside the tunnel at the foot of the slope is a lean-to hut, built of logs. The door was open, and in a bunk inside I saw a strange man tied up and gagged. He is conscious, and glowered at me like a trapped wild beast. I don’t think he can be the man we saw Henderson struggling with on the cliff-top.’

‘No, he must be another,’ Rose replied. ‘Henderson could never have brought him down the slope and put him there in the time, and weak and wounded, half fainting, as he was.’

She climbed up a little faster now, but just as carefully; and, with deep sighs of relief, Amy and Trixy at length saw her reach the ledge and scramble on to it, declining Parrett's aid.

Her first care was for the insensible stock-rider. She bent over him and saw that he was bleeding still from the left shoulder.

'You go and make sure that the man in the hut is secure and not likely to free himself, Parrett,' she said, 'while I bind up Henderson's wound. Lend me your handkerchief. I may need it, as well as my own and his neck-cloth.'

Rose had been a patrol leader in the school Girl Guide corps at Bunyah, and knew how to stop both venous and arterial bleeding. Henderson was only bleeding from a vein.

'Fetch me some water, if you can find any, Parrett. You ought to be able to,' she called after the chauffeur.

The latter was back again promptly with a 'billy,' or can, of water.

'There's a big barrel full of water in the hut,' he said, 'and the fellow there is trussed up too tightly to get loose. He's a half-caste. While you're attending to Henderson, miss, I had better go up to the hill-top and make sure also that the man there hasn't got loose?'

'Yes, take this revolver,' drawing one of two such weapons from Henderson's belt. 'Call me if you need any help with the ruffian, and I'll bring the other pistol. I know how to use it.'

'There are two rifles also inside the hut,' said Parrett. 'I'll leave you one and take the other, and I'll throw down this rope to Miss Amy and Miss Trixy, so that they can make their end of the rope-

ladder fast to the rocks below. Then they won't have to hang on to it to keep it steady when we are going down. There's a longer rope also in the hut by which we can lower Henderson, miss.'

'Good!' replied Rose. And she proceeded to soak a pad, composed of her own handkerchief folded several times, in some of the water and place it over the stock-rider's wound, which she had laid bare by ripping open with his sheath-knife the seams of his shirt-sleeve.

Parrett went off, armed with one of the rifles, as well as the revolver; and by the time she heard him returning Rose had bandaged up her patient and was forcing sips of water between the close-set lips and bathing the pale forehead. Henderson was already coming out of his swoon.

The chauffeur came rushing on to the ledge, greatly alarmed.

'The man on the cliff-top, a white man, is dead, miss—shot through the head. But there's a party of about a dozen horsemen coming full tilt in this direction from the desert. None of them is in police uniform, but they all carry rifles. If they're the sheep-stealers, and I fear they must be, we are as good as trapped up here, miss. They'll be on us before we can lower Henderson here to your cousins, much less get down ourselves.'

'And neither of my cousins can drive the car, or I'd call to them to make off and fetch help,' gasped Rose. 'They must come up. Amy! Trixy!' she called down to the pair below. 'Come up, both of you, at once. I want you. The climb's easy and safe enough, if you only take moderate care. Don't be scared, now. Try it! Remember you are Girl Guides, and oughtn't to funk anything. Come up

now at once. Keep your eyes fixed on the rock-face as you come up, don't look down, and hold tight, and you'll be quite safe—find it easy enough. Trixy, you come first.'

Her cousins had tied their end of the rope-ladder firmly to boulders at the base of the cliff, and, satisfied that it would not sway, they both essayed the climb after only a momentary hesitation. After all, they were Girl Guides and plucky enough, and what Rose had accomplished surely they could also.

They mounted very slowly, however, and Rose and Parrett were consumed with anxious suspense lest the horsemen should arrive before they had got up.

Higher and higher they climbed, Amy close behind Trixy and urging her on, encouraging her—nearer and nearer they drew to the ledge and the anxiously impatient pair upon it.

'That's right, Miss Rose,' whispered Henderson in a feeble voice. 'Get them up here, and then throw down or draw up the rope-ladder, and you'll be quite safe, whoever the horsemen are. No one can climb the hill anywhere.'

'Ah, you've come round, Henderson, and heard what we said?'

'Yes, miss, and thanks for the trouble you've taken with me. The sheep-stealers captured me and were keeping me a prisoner here. It's too long a story to tell you everything now, and I don't want to do much talking yet. When I heard friends were near, I managed to free myself, and then I crept out and first knocked out the half-caste—jumped him as he was watching out for you behind the loose rock there. Then I got his pistol and went up the slope

and surprised the second man, just as you were driving by. I didn't kill him. He shot himself accidentally in the scuffle.'

As he ceased speaking, Trixy came within arm's reach of Parrett and Rose, both of whom instantly grabbed hold of her wrists and positively lugged her, neck and crop, on to the ledge between them.

'Steady on!' she gasped in surprise. 'I was getting up all right myself. You nearly pulled my arms out by the roots. Ha! what's that?'

A peculiar sound, growing rapidly louder and more distinct, came ringing and echoing along the pass. It was the clatter of approaching hoofs on the rocky bed of another of the criss-cross defiles. It was the strange horsemen coming to the spot!

'Horsemen coming! They must be friends—the mounted police or some of our stockmen,' cried Amy pausing in her ascent and turning her head along the pass in the direction of the sounds.

'No, no, come on up, quick! They may be enemies,' cried Rose.

And she and Parrett, kneeling again, stretched their arms clutchingly towards the girl.

In wild alarm, she promptly climbed on; and, grasping her sharply, like her sister, the moment she was within their reach, the pair dragged her also up beside them.

Henderson had already been placed, in a reclining posture, behind the loose boulder; and the rest of the little party now hurriedly joined him there. And then they all waited, panting with their exertions and the excitement of the moment, and not without a considerable amount of trepidation on the part of Trixy and Amy, for the coming of the unknown horsemen.

They were not kept long in suspense. A second or two later round a bend in the pass, from the same direction as our motorists had come, swept some ten or twelve horsemen at an easy gallop.

At sight of the rope-ladder hanging down the lower face of the bay, the foremost uttered startled shouts and reined in so sharply as to cause their horses to rear and prance wildly, and those behind almost to collide with them.

From where they were the motor-car was invisible, being hidden by another sharp turn in the pass, for Parrett had driven some yards past the bay before Henderson and the sentinel had shown upon the cliff-top.

‘The ladder is down! What’s that mean? Sure as anything our prisoner has escaped. Coo-ee! Duff—Fink! Where are you?’ went up a stentorian shout, which the rocks around echoed.

Rose was peeping round the side of the loose rock, and, with a thrill of mingled surprise and just anger, she recognized the man who called out, the leader of the band, as Ed. or Edward Binning, one of the two brothers owning Sampson Downs Station!

She had never liked either of the brothers, the little she had seen of them or been brought in contact with them, but to learn that one of them at least, the man before her, undoubtedly belonged to the gang of sheep-stealers, was startling in the extreme.

On the spur of the moment she stepped out from behind the rock into the plain view of the man and his companions, darted to the rope-ladder, and, heaving with all her strength upon it, unhooked one side of it from its ring-bolt.

Every man of the gang sat his saddle as if transfixed or turned to stone for a moment. Then, as she

made to free the second hook, a yell of amazement and consternation came from all.

‘Stop! Don’t throw down the ladder. Don’t you know me, Miss Barton? I am Ed. Binning, your neighbour,’ roared the bandit chief.

‘I know you now, Edward Binning, for what you really are—a low, cunning thief—a man who steals other people’s sheep.’

She was unable to release the second hook of the rope-ladder owing to the weight of this; and perceiving that, Binning, who had his rifle unslung and held athwart his horse’s neck, promptly brought the weapon to his shoulder and pointed it at her.

‘Stop, or I shoot!’ he bawled.

Parrett was plucking up courage to rush to her assistance, when she caught up Henderson’s sheath-knife, which lay beside her on the rock, and slashed desperately at the rope to which the hook was attached.

‘Stop it, Miss Barton, I say!’ howled Binning, who from his position could see what she was doing.

And to scare her he fired at the rock-face just above her.

The bullet smacked against the cliff and rebounded over the heads of her cousins and Parrett, cowering behind the boulder, into the pass. But, undismayed, the brave girl continued to slash at the rope with the knife. Several of the strands had been severed; then the last parted before the keen-edged blade, and the ladder disappearing over the edge, could be heard slithering swiftly down the face of the rock below.

‘Well done, miss!’ panted Parrett, rushing forward now and dragging her back smartly behind the sheltering boulder, just in time to escape a

regular volley from the desperate and enraged gang in the pass.

Crack! crack! crack! Smack! smack! smack! Fully half a dozen rifle-bullets starred the rock-face at the back of the ledge and rebounded across the defile. Some of the shots, indeed, judging from where they hit, might have been deliberately fired with the intention of striking her.

Amy and Trixy cowered down upon the rock, although the huge boulder was between them and the rifles of their enemies. But Rose laughed gaily at the gang's discomfiture.

It must be admitted, however, that her laughter was somewhat hysterical, as was only natural in the circumstances.

'You are not hit, Parrett?' she asked concernedly, then.

'No, miss. Neither are you, are you?'

'No. And we've bested them properly. They can't get at us now. The only thing is that they have got us all "treed," so to speak—"cribb'd, cabin'd, and confined," and for goodness knows how long, unless we can think of some way of signalling to our friends for help.'

CHAPTER VI

A SURPRISE FOR ROSE, AND THE GANG

‘**B**RAVO, Miss Barton! You are a true daughter of your father, who was one of the bravest men I ever knew,’ weakly cried Phil Henderson, who had struggled to his feet in order to go to her help, when anticipated by the chauffeur.

Indeed, it was the evident effort he was making which prompted Parrett’s action—shamed the latter into making a move.

‘We are quite safe up here, Henderson, you said? No one can get up anywhere else around the hill?’

‘That is so, miss. They are baffled, now you’ve thrown the rope-ladder down. I don’t know of any other way they can get up,’ the wounded man answered. ‘They kept the stolen sheep on the top here. The last lot they stole are up there now. There’s grand pasture for them. You see what they did was to make for here as quickly as they could with the sheep they stole, generally by way of the desert, some of them of course following behind the main body and smoothing over and in other ways blinding the trail. Two men were always left up here. They lived in the hut behind the tunnel. They let down the rope-ladder when their friends came with the stolen sheep, which were then carried up on the men’s backs or hauled up by ropes to this ledge and driven up the slope beyond the tunnel on to the hill-top. That is why they didn’t ever carry

off more than a couple of hundred head of sheep at a time, miss. It would have taken 'em too long to get a bigger number of sheep up here, or down again to cart off to sell, in the little time they would have at their disposal. They have a regular "duffing-yard" on the hill-top.'

'But how are we to let our friends know where we are?' asked Trixy, still in considerable fear, and trembling. 'We are in an ugly predicament, even though we may be safe from molestation by the sheep-stealers. The ruffians may keep us stuck up here indefinitely—all night, and longer. What a pity we didn't tell someone where we were coming!'

'Binning and his men are bound to destroy our car,' said Amy, 'and in any case we can only get down by one of us being lowered at the end of a rope and tying the rope-ladder to it so that we can haul it up again. And the gang will keep us up here as long as they can.'

'What is there to prevent us making a bonfire on the hill-top after dark, or sending up smoke-signals right away, for that matter, to attract attention?' laughed Rose. 'Cheerio! we might be in a far worse plight.'

'Exactly, Miss Rose! You've taken the words out of my mouth,' put in Henderson. 'I was about to suggest you should send up smoke-signals right away, on the hill-top. There's plenty of timber up there—the gang has the whole top fenced in—and there's plenty of grass and some scrub, too. Leave me one of the rifles, in case that half-caste fellow contrives to free himself, and you four go up and start signalling for help. I'm feeling stronger now, and shan't chuck a dummy—I mean faint—again, I promise you.'

‘Very good! Keep an eye also, Henderson, on the gang below. They must be pretty desperate, knowing that if they have got us shut up here we’ve also got them in a cleft stick—that sooner or later our friends must come to look for us, and their game is up. There’s no saying in the circumstances what means they may employ to get at us.’

‘I’ll watch them and the half-caste closely, you may rely, Miss Rose. Of course in the first place someone must have got up here by means of a long ladder, I should say—probably a peg-ladder, that is one with a single standard and crosspieces inserted through it or nailed on. The gang may try to get up in some such way now, for as you say Ed. Binning must be at his wits’ end how to deal with us. But with the rifle I can easily keep them at bay.’

‘The gang are holding a confab. now,’ observed Parrett, who was reconnoitring round the huge boulder. ‘I’ll fetch you some more cartridges from the hut, Henderson.’

The chauffeur was soon back, and he reported that the half-caste was still securely bound, hand and foot. So he and the three girls set off. They passed through the low archway in the rock behind, looked in at the open door of the hut at their scowling, evil-faced prisoner, just out of curiosity—although Trixy shuddered at sight of him—and then ascended the sloping gully.

The bed of this was of sun-baked clay upon long, shallow, stair-like ledges, up which sheep could be easily driven, and the rocky walls on either side went up sheer to the hill-top, gradually lessening in height as they advanced. It brought them out upon a plateau measuring several acres in extent and as level almost as a billiard-table. Everywhere the

place was thickly overgrown with grass, upon which several hundred sheep were browsing. A rude fence practically enclosed the whole area, being set at only a few yards in from the brink, to prevent its being seen from any of the defiles below.

Near where the gully came up was a stockyard built partly of stones and partly of logs and rails, with pens for branding the sheep, or rather for altering or 'faking' their brands. Only here and there around the brink was there any scrub, and that probably had been replanted in order to deceive anyone traversing the passes below into thinking that the entire summit was so covered.

As that particular hill or table-land stood considerably higher than any of the rest in the cluster, Rose Barton and her companions were able to overlook a tremendous stretch of country in every direction. They were able to see far across the desert northward, and even to descry the distant roofs and chimneys of their home, Springside Station, and of Sampson Downs Station, the property of the Binning brothers, lying between Springside and the desert.

'Pull down some of these rails and start our fire,' ordered Rose. 'As we can see Springside so plainly, some of the hands there ought readily to notice our smoke signals.'

A brisk fire was soon going; then some of the scrub and grass, first dipped in one of the several water-holes which had been sunk by the sheep-stealers, were thrown upon the blaze, sending up thick clouds of smoke. Parrett now doffed his livery coat, and, taking it between them, he and Rose held it for a moment over the smoke, keeping this down, then sharply turned it over and sent a great puff, like a cloudlet, into the air.



THE SMOKE SIGNAL IN THE BUSH

(see page 122)

They kept on doing this until they were tired, when, just as Amy and Trixy were about to relieve them at the business, there smote upon their ears the sharp 'crack-crack' of rifles, of volley after volley, from the direction of the bay, echoed and re-echoed as usual by the rocks around.

Without a word, with one accord, they all raced towards the bay, and, clambering over the fence, threw themselves prone close to the verge, to which Rose and Parrett then crawled. Peering over, the pair saw to their surprise and no small alarm, all but two of the sheep-stealers in the act of rearing a tall, slender, straight tree, lopped of all its branches, against the cliff-wall they were looking down.

The fellows had tied one end of the tree to boulders so that it could not slide away or slip, but must remain stationary, and they were all in a bunch under the other end, which was upraised on their hands. They were walking slowly towards the fixed end, pushing the free end, therefore, higher and higher.

It would not be long before they would thus have the tree perfectly upright against the ledge, which it was tall enough to reach!

The two other members of the gang stood over by the opposite cliff and were covering their confederates by keeping up a dropping fire from their rifles at the ledge.

Furthermore, to her surprise, Rose saw that one of these two marksmen had his coat turned inside out and wore a handkerchief tied across the lower part of his face, clearly to conceal it!

Who was that man?

She glanced quickly at the others to see whether Ed. Binning was amongst them. He was. He was

one of the bunch walking under the tree-trunk, rearing it up.

Rose counted the number of the gang. Thirteen! They had only been twelve in number before.

Then the masked man had come since she and her companions had left the ledge.

As she asked herself again in wonderment who he could be, there were two spurts of flame in swift succession from the ledge, and with cries of pain both he and the other sharpshooter stumbled, and fell, dropping their rifles.

'Well done, Henderson!' she cried, exultantly. 'Chip in, Parrett! But don't shoot to kill. Shoot to miss, like I do—just to scare them off.'

She had armed herself with one of the revolvers, and the chauffeur had the other rifle. Pointing their respective weapons down at the bed of the pass—at the vacant space between the gang uprearing the tree-trunk and the two wounded rascals—she and Parrett blazed away as fast as they could pull the triggers.

Already dismayed by the fate of their two confederates, the gang under the felled tree became panic-stricken at the hail of rifle- and pistol-bullets from the cliff-top, although none of their number was struck down. As one man, they dropped the tree-trunk and fled helter-skelter for the nearest bend in the pass.

They almost ran into the levelled rifles of a party of men, equal in number to themselves, who suddenly showed at the bend.

'Stand! Surrender! Up with your hands, all of you! We'll shoot down any who attempt resistance or to run back,' shouted an authoritative voice.

And Rose, to her extreme gratification, saw that

about half the newcomers wore the mounted police uniform, and the other half were some of her own stockmen from Springside.

Faced as they were by so many pointed rifles, and with their own slung upon their backs, none of the sheep-stealers—not even Ed. Binning—ventured to try and draw a pistol or to wheel about and make a dash for liberty in the opposite direction. They all put up their hands, shrinkingly, before the levelled tubes; and, bidding his men to keep them covered, the police-officer advanced, revolver in hand, and disarmed each of the eleven rogues in succession.

He then told two of the troopers to handcuff them, and went on to where the two wounded men lay. Fascinated by the scene, the whole quartette on the cliff-top, after giving one rousing, almost involuntary cheer, watched the inspector go up to the masked desperado and snatch the handkerchief from his face.

‘Ezra Mulson!’ literally screamed Rose, as the upturned features were uncovered and she recognized them, even at the height she was.

‘Ezra Mulson, our overseer!’ echoed Trixy in tones of incredulous horror. ‘It can’t be.’

But it was.

What remains to be told that the reader cannot guess for herself?

Rose and her cousins and Parrett lost little further time in hurrying back down to the ledge, where they found that Henderson had already lowered a rope to his fellow stock-riders and the police and hauled up the rope-ladder. Some of the troopers then ascended by it and lowered Phil, the prisoner, and the dead man to their comrades. Then the girls were also lowered by the rope, for quickness sake, and because Amy

and Trixy preferred that method of descent to using the rope-ladder.

When Rose reached the ground, she went at once to where Mulson, her perfidious overseer, lay in the midst of his fellow-prisoners. He was dying. Henderson's bullet, although only meant to disable him, had struck him in a vital place. He just lived long enough to look up at the young mistress he had so basely deceived, and murmur:

'I may as well confess everything now. Your father's death was not an accident, Miss Rose. I shot him dead, because he had just picked up and read a letter which I had the mischance to pull out of my pocket with my tobacco-pouch. The letter was from James Binning to me, enclosing my share of the money obtained by the sale away in Queensland, of some of the sheep we had stolen. He wanted an explanation of how I came by so much money—he had seen Binning's signature—and held me off while he glanced over the letter, and there was nothing else for it but to grab his rifle and shoot him with it.'

James Binning, Ed's brother, was taken that same evening without a struggle on the veranda of their station. He was unsuspectingly awaiting his brother's return from sending off the stolen sheep on the hill-top in charge of some of their men, to sell in an out-of-the-way part of Queensland. Thus the whole of the rascally gang of sheep-stealers were rounded up.

It was not until next day that all the sheep on the plateau were got down and brought to Springside. Some of them still had that station's badge upon them, viz., 'H.B.' inside a diamond. Others had had

that brand altered to B.B. with a circle enclosing the diamond. Others, again, a very small minority, bore the Sampson Downs brand—S.D-B. in a square. They, of course, had been put there to avert suspicion—to make it appear that sheep were stolen indiscriminately from both stations.

The other wounded rogue survived and stood his trial with his two rascally employers and the rest of the gang; and the affair naturally created a great sensation owing to the social position of the Binning brothers and the revelation of Mulson's double-dealing. All of them were sentenced to exemplary terms of imprisonment, the two brothers of course receiving the severest penalties. Henderson's shooting of Mulson was considered justifiable homicide.

Rose Barton, with her aunt and her cousins, carried on the business of Springside, undeterred by what had occurred. She promoted Phil Henderson to the vacant position of overseer, and subsequently took over from Government the neighbouring station of Sampson Downs. The joint property is to-day one of the most prosperous estates in South Australia, the wool it produces being inferior to none other in the Commonwealth.

And the story is still told in the men's quarters, to 'new chums,' or hands taken on temporarily for the sheep-shearing season, how 'Mr. Henderson' was captured by some of the Binning and Mulson Gang on the watch in the passes of the Langdale Cliffs, when he went there the night he asked leave of absence from his young mistress.

'You see,' the narrator will explain, in more or less different words each time, 'he went there acause he had had his suspicions aroused that the gang was using the Cliffs somehow to hide the sheep, though

he couldn't quite imagine how. Just as he entered the main pass, he was pounced on by four of the gang on the watch. They took him by surprise and knocked him silly. When he woke up he was inside the hut behind the ledge, tied 'and and foot, and the gang were bringing up the sheep they'd pinched from 'ere that same night. He was there, a prisoner, guarded by two of the gang three days; and on the third day, as this 'ere noospaper account'll tell ye, Miss Rose—God bless her! for there ain't a better mistress nowheres, so kind and thoughtful, and all that—and her cousins, Miss Amy and Miss Trixy—went a-motoring out to the Cliffs.'

We need not follow the rest of the narrative, which was generally delivered with a great deal of circumlocution and considerable ornamentation of or divergence from the actual facts, as we know these already.

A REALLY charming story
which will make you feel
the better for reading it.

THE ODD NUMBER

By Alys Chatwyn.

‘O F course,’ as Honor Lovel declared, ‘any one might have known how it would be,’ when the powers-that-were at Glencairn first hit on the idea of making the girls who were senior enough to have studies of their own room together in trios. To be sure, the studies were quite commodious enough to hold three girls comfortably, and in a fast-growing school like Glencairn, where there were so many seniors, it was difficult enough even under those conditions to find enough rooms to go round; but still, ‘two’s company, three’s none,’ so how (especially as you were not allowed to choose your own third room-mate, but had to put up with whomsoever the Fates elected to send you) could such a plan possibly have been expected to work?

No one would have echoed these sentiments more fervently than Honor’s room-mate, Ethel Marryatt, for the decree that seniors were henceforward to join forces in threes instead of twos had brought about the keenest disappointment of her life. How proud and happy she had been when she had first begun to share Honor’s study! Indeed, it had been largely with that object in view that she had worked and slaved to get into the Fifth Form, where Honor was already—a thing which, for her, was only to be accomplished by the most strenuous effort; for Ethel was not in the least clever, unlike Honor, who was one of the most brilliant girls in the school, although perfectly simple

and unconscious of the fact, as really clever people often are.

But for the sake of being in the same form, and possibly the same study with Honor, Ethel would cheerfully have worked her fingers to the bone, or, as she herself expressed it, 'her brain to a pulp'; and she had seldom thought the Fates kinder than when, just as she had accomplished her ambition and won the 'remove' which would entitle her to study-partnership, Honor's room-mate had happened to leave, and she had thus been able to slip into the vacant place. It was not only the promotion that delighted her; but now at last, she thought, she would have ample opportunity for 'getting in' with the girl she had always adored, and perhaps becoming Honor Lovel's real, instead of only her 'would-be,' chief friend.

The pleasure lasted for just a week. Then a thunderbolt had fallen in the shape of the aforesaid mandate about trios rooming together; and as though that were not bad enough, Ethel discovered to her extreme horror that the unwelcome intruder into No. 4 study was to be none other than Lilius Desmond.

And the worst of it was that Honor, although, as had been seen, she was ready enough to grumble at the new arrangement so long as it was only a matter of theory, no sooner found out who her new companion was to be than, instead of sharing Ethel's disgust, she was but too manifestly delighted. Indeed, the school as a whole seemed distinctly envious of the established occupants of No. 4, an attitude highly trying to Ethel, who felt that she could have dispensed with the assumed blessing of Lilius Desmond's society remarkably well.

Yet Liliás was decidedly the chosen favourite of Glencairn, and her popularity was in many ways accountable. She was an exceptionally pretty girl to begin with, quite the school beauty, superficially brilliant in the showy, versatile way of many small accomplishments which so easily create an impression, and quite capable when she chose, of making herself both amusing and charming. The fact that all the heroine-worship she received had turned her fluffy golden head so thoroughly that, in spite of her attractive qualities, she was also exceedingly selfish and spoilt, was something which had as yet been realized by hardly any one except Ethel. Ethel Marryatt's perceptions on the subject were, if it must be confessed, sharpened by acute jealousy; for she knew only too well that her beloved Honor was among Liliás's worshippers.

Ethel did not know how to endure the first evening of the intrusion, when Liliás, seeming quite to lighten up the little study with her dancing, dimpling face and dainty dress and sparkling wealth of curls, established herself in the only comfortable chair and proceeded to lord it over the other two in the gay little queenly way which nobody except Ethel ever appeared to resent, capturing the whole of Honor's attention and utterly eclipsing poor Ethel, who had never felt so insignificant and 'out of it' in her life. Liliás always enjoyed making an impression, and 'showed off' in ways which Ethel thought bad taste.

'Let's have some music,' she suggested gaily, and, opening her mandoline-case, she sang comic songs to her own accompaniment, prettily and amusingly enough, but quite heedless of the fact that Honor had been deep in mathematics and must therefore have wanted to be quiet.

Again, having scribbled on a bit of paper, she said laughingly: 'That's how you look when you're working,' and showed a rather clever little caricature of the funny angular way in which Honor was wont to curl herself up over her lessons.

Honor, seeming thoroughly to enjoy being tyrannized over, cheerfully let her preparation wait until the music was concluded, and blinked her short-sighted eyes over the drawing. She was perfectly ready to appreciate the joke against herself, resenting neither the caricature nor being laughed at by Liliás as 'you blind old bat,' and evidently revelling in Liliás's lively companionship.

After a while Ethel Marryatt felt that she really could stand it no longer, and left the room. She went up to her dormitory and looked at her own rather unnoticeable reflection in the glass.

'It's no wonder Honor doesn't want me when she's got Liliás,' she thought bitterly, and then with quick rebellion, 'I don't care! I may be dull and plain, but I'm worth more than Liliás anyway, because I'm not such a selfish pig. And as for Honor, she's worth a dozen Liliáses, if she could only see it.'

'I wouldn't mind so much,' Ethel thought bitterly, 'her wanting to be chums with somebody else instead of me, if only it were somebody worth while. But to see a splendid girl like Honor taken in by Liliás and adoring her, and Liliás treating it all as her right, and making a perfect slave of Honor and not appreciating her a bit—oh, it's simply maddening!'

This made it all the more strange that, when at last the almost inevitable explosion occurred, and the two quarrelled, it was Honor who was in the wrong.

It was all very unlucky, but it had occurred one day when Liliás had been more than usually trying, and

Honor, who was feeling very tired and irritable from a headache, less ready than in general to make allowances even for her adored Liliás. She had answered various playfully teasing remarks less patiently than usual, and all at once, looking up with a harassed face from a hunt among her papers, said suddenly and sharply: 'I say, where on earth are my literature notes?'

Ethel answered, 'I don't know,' and at once began to search, but Liliás must needs add, with an irritating laugh: 'I suppose they're lost, like most of your belongings. We haven't swallowed them, anyway, so it's no use trying to turn us into your scapegoats!'

'But they're gone, and I simply must have them, because of the exam. to-morrow!' returned Honor, with an agitation which was largely the outcome of overtiredness. 'Look here, Liliás, I believe you had them! Yes, I know you had. What did you do with them?'

'Put them back with your books,' replied Liliás decidedly.

'You can't have done so, or they'd be here now,' Honor protested, frenziedly hunting.

'I tell you, I did. Do you mean to say I'm not telling the truth?' cried Liliás, catching fire instantly.

'Of course not; but you've forgotten or—something. Why can't you try to remember?' snapped Honor, with the heat of a much-trodden worm that had turned at last.

'Because I have—not—got your wretched notes! I believe you think I'm keeping them back on purpose to cheat you in the exam!' retorted Liliás furiously, adding, with a sudden change of tone, as she pointed to the corner of a red note-book sticking out from

under a scarf Honor had thrown on the table, 'There now, look! What's that?'

Honor snatched it up, and there, sure enough, were the missing notes.

'I told you so! Now perhaps you'll apologize,' said Liliás with icy hauteur; and as she spoke she threw back her head like a tragedy queen, looking a picture of injured innocence pretty enough to have been effective on the stage, albeit in real life it only made Ethel long to slap her.

But Honor turned at once, her sweet, honest face full of contrition.

'Of course I will,' she said eagerly. 'Dear old girl, I'm most awfully sorry. It was idiotic of me to think it was your fault. Pax!' and she held out her hand.

But Liliás made no attempt to take it.

'No, thanks,' she retorted icily. 'It's all very fine for you to suspect me of being careless and untruthful and cheating, and I don't know what, and then give in when you see you're wrong, and can't help it. But that's not the sort of friendship I'm used to, and I don't want to have anything more to do with you.' With which she stalked out of the room and slammed the door.

Honor turned to her other room-mate, and the white pain in her face cut Ethel to the quick.

'Oh, Ethel!' she faltered, 'what am I to do? Won't she make it up? I know I lost my temper abominably, but it was only for a minute. I never meant to make her really angry.'

'Of course you didn't, and of course you haven't either. Even Liliás couldn't be idiotic enough to make a mountain out of a molehill like that,' was Ethel's reply.

But she was mistaken, for Liliás not only could, but

did. Absurdly trivial though the quarrel seemed, she took upon herself to treat it seriously; for she was spoilt to the extent of being utterly unaccustomed to the mildest sort of provocation, and the idea that her special slave, Honor Lovel, should turn upon her, even for a moment and under a mistake, appeared to her perfectly monstrous. So she repulsed all poor Honor's overtures, went about with other friends, and invited them into No. 4 whenever she had to be there herself, and utterly declined to make it up.

Faithful, sensitive Honor took the matter to heart in a way which Ethel could not bear to see, especially as she persisted in blaming not Liliás but herself.

'It was all my fault. I ought to have remembered how awfully sensitive Liliás is. No wonder she thought I meant she was cheating,' she said miserably; nor could she be persuaded that she was in no way to blame for the preposterous length to which Liliás carried the trifling quarrel.

'Honor, why will you throw yourself away on Liliás like this? Can't you see that a friendship which smashes up as easily as that isn't worth having?' Ethel could not help bursting out one evening, on entering No. 4 and finding Honor sitting there alone, with her head in her hands, in an attitude of extreme dejection.

Honor looked up wearily.

'I'm awfully fond of Liliás, you see,' she said simply, 'and you don't understand her, Ethel.' Then, trying to smile, she added: 'I wasn't just sitting and moping about it, though. I'm fagged to-night, and my head aches again; I think it must be because my eyes are tired. D'you know, Ethel, I'm beginning to think that there must be something wrong with them somehow? You know they were always rather short-

sighted and queer, and lately they've hurt sometimes.'

'I should ask the health mistress about it, if I were you,' advised Ethel concernedly.

'I think I will,' said Honor, and went off with her hand shading her eyes.

Next day she did not appear in school, and a rumour went about which frightened Ethel.

'D'you mean Honor's eyes are really bad?' she asked anxiously of the girl who had passed the report on to her. 'I say, they'll get all right again some time, won't they?'

Her tone sounded scared, for at the back of her mind a voice to which she hardly dared listen was whispering that people sometimes did go blind, although surely nothing so dreadful could be going to happen.

The answer, however, was reassuring.

'Oh, yes. It's nothing *lasting*; just overstrain. I don't suppose she'll even have to wear specs. But she mustn't use them for a bit, and she'll have to stop in the dark for two or three weeks till they get rested; and it's awfully bad luck for her, poor old thing, 'specially with the tennis tournament just coming on.'

Ethel breathed again. But she seized the first opportunity of going to see her friend and cheer her up. She found Honor sitting in a darkened room, with a shade over her eyes, and it was evident that the cheering-up process was needful.

At the first sound of Ethel's footstep she turned in her chair, saying eagerly: 'Oh, Lilius, is that you?' And the wistful, disappointed droop of her mouth when Ethel answered, 'No, it's only me,' stabbed her would-be chum like a knife.

All at once she cut short Ethel's condolences by saying: 'Oh, you needn't bother to be sorry for me

about *that*. My eyes will soon be all right again. I wouldn't mind stopping in the dark for a little while if only—if only—oh, Ethel, I'm so awfully unhappy about Lillas. I do think she might make it up *now*. It's—it's so beastly to sit here in the dark and know you're in the middle of a row with the girl you care for most.'

She was not well enough to have quite her usual self-control, and her voice quivered in spite of herself. Ethel got up abruptly.

'Look here,' she said curtly, 'I'll go and *make* Lillas come to you.'

With somewhat the feeling of 'signing her own death-warrant,' she nevertheless went straight off to No. 4 study, and, as it happened, found Lillas there alone. Ethel lost no time in plunging straight at her errand.

'See here,' she said abruptly, 'you've got to come to Honor—*now*.'

Lillas' pretty eyebrows knitted. 'What for?' she asked sharply.

'Because she wants you,' Ethel answered simply. It seemed to her the best of reasons.

But Lillas laughed scornfully. 'Oh, indeed, *does* she?' she retorted. 'And supposing I don't choose to obey her majesty's summons?'

Ethel drew a hard breath. 'Do you mean to say,' she said slowly, 'that you *won't* come to Honor and make it up with her—not even now, when she's ill?'

'She's not ill. It's only her eyes. And I'm bothered if I'm going to be *made* to make it up with her, after the way she as good as accused me of cheating or telling untruths. I said I wouldn't have anything more to do with her, and I won't,' Lillas retorted; but somehow she did not look up as she spoke; had she

done so she would have found it rather difficult to meet the utter contempt in Ethel's eyes.

Ethel waited a moment in grim silence. Then——

'So that's all you're worth!' she said, slowly and witheringly, and went straight out of the room; and, strange to say, Liliás let her go without an answer.

But it must be confessed that Ethel's own thoughts at that moment would not have borne examination very well. So far from being sorry that her mission had failed, she was fiercely exultant. She had done her best; she had honestly tried, as she expressed it to herself, to 'cut off her nose to spite her face' by making the peace between Honor and Liliás; but it was not to be done; and surely, *surely* even Honor would now see that Liliás had been tried and found hopelessly wanting, and turn at last to the true instead of the false friend.

The claims of various classes prevented her from going straight back to the sick-room with the bad news, which to her was so good, that Liliás persisted in remaining hostile. It was not until nearly bedtime that she could find a free minute, and then she received a check, for Miss Boyd, the health mistress, told her that Honor was already in bed and must not be disturbed.

'You really can't come and talk to Honor now, dear; it's much too late,' Miss Boyd said firmly. 'I want her to go to sleep. You may just say good-night to her, if you like, but I can't let you stay even for a minute.'

So Ethel went in. Honor was lying high on her pillows with her arms tossed up over her head, in a restless attitude which had no suggestion of sleep; but at the footstep and Miss Boyd's words she started up in bed, her white face flushing eagerly.

‘Lilias!’ she exclaimed breathlessly. ‘Oh! Lilias, is that you? I’m so glad you’ve come! I thought you would! You do understand now, don’t you, that I really didn’t mean anything hateful? You don’t know how awfully unhappy I’ve been; but it’s all right now, isn’t it?’

She stretched out her hands, groping pitifully, and caught hold of Ethel. Temporarily blind from the shade over her eyes, there was nothing to tell her that her girl visitor was *not* Lilias; and somehow the explanation died on Ethel’s lips. It was all too pathetic; she felt utterly incapable of striking the sudden happiness out of Honor’s wan face by the simple phrase, ‘It’s only me.’

Miss Boyd came forward, saying briskly: ‘Now, no talking; it’s too late. I am going to whisk your friend away, Honor. I only let her come in to say good-night, not to chatter.’

‘It doesn’t matter about talking; there’s no need for that,’ said Honor happily. ‘Only kiss me, Lilias, just to show it’s all right.’

‘I’d better do it. She’ll think it’s Lilias, as she can’t see me, and be happy for to-night, anyway. I just *can’t* tell her it’s *not* all right,’ flashed through Ethel’s mind.

And bending down in silence she kissed her friend’s cheek.

The fervour of the kiss which answered her hurt almost unendurably, for Honor had never kissed her before like that, and she knew the kiss was meant for Lilias.

She was glad to escape from the room. Her mind was in a whirl. Very soon, she knew, Honor would have to be enlightened and know that Lilias had *not*, after all, ‘played the game,’ unless—unless—

Unless it was possible that she need never know!

To that possibility Ethel tried to shut her eyes, but in vain. There might, and she knew it, be still a chance of peacemaking. If she cared for Honor enough to give up everything for her, there was still one way untried; but the way was bitterly hard, and no one guessed that night how hard a fight was being fought out in Ethel's quiet cubicle.

Early next morning Liliás was collecting her books in No. 4 when her room-mate, Ethel, walked in and set her back to the door with a deliberate intention there was no mistaking.

Liliás looked up angrily. Ethel's face, she noticed, was oddly white, and she had the look of a person going through some intense strain as she said abruptly: 'Liliás, you've got to come and make it up with Honor.'

'I told you before——' Liliás began hotly and determinedly.

'I know what you told me, but it doesn't count,' Ethel interrupted, 'because you've got to take it back and come. You've got to. Look here, Liliás!' She took a step forward and laid her hand, not caressingly, but with a compelling grip, on the other girl's shoulder. 'Last night, when you wouldn't go to Honor, *I* went instead, and she took me for you. How could she help it? Of course, she was expecting you to be decent and come to her'——she saw the colour flame into Liliás's cheeks——'and there was nothing to tell her, in the dark, that it was only me. She couldn't tell by my voice even, for Miss Boyd wouldn't let us talk, as it was late; but she asked me, thinking it was *you*, to kiss her, and—I did it.'

The grip of her hand tightened.

'I pretended it was you. If you had been there and

seen Honor, you'd have understood; she wanted you so. The making-up had simply got to be done, so as you wouldn't do it yourself I just did it for you; and now you've got to play up to me. I won't have you let me down and spoil it all by trying to go on with a quarrel that's finished and done with. I just *played substitute* for you last night, like I've done in hockey matches, and now you've got to go on with the game yourself. I made you out a friend worth having, and it's up to you to show you really *are* one.'

Ethel stopped abruptly, and drew a deep breath. She had played her last card, she had fought her hardest for what she did not want, and even now she did not know whether she had won.

But she had; for, although she did not know it, the battle had been half over before it had begun. For all night long Liliás's waking thoughts and sleeping dreams had been haunted by Honor's wistful face and Ethel's contemptuous words, 'So *that's* all you're worth.' She was, in fact, secretly longing to make it up, and now it was no hard matter to master the remnant of her pride.

Besides, she felt as mean as dirt in comparison with the girl before her—felt humiliated to the very dust.

So it came to pass that, without questioning Ethel's authority or meeting her eyes, Liliás, the majestic, hung her head and muttered awkwardly:

'All right. I'll do it, if you like.'

Without a word Ethel swung round and led the way to the sick-room. There was no difficulty this time about gaining admittance, and they went in.

The room was half dark, but they could dimly see Honor sitting in a big chair, white and tired-looking, with idle hands and shaded eyes. At their footsteps, however, she started up and came stumblingly and

gropingly towards them, saying, 'It's Liliás, isn't it?'

And somehow that finished matters. For Liliás was not really a bad or an unfeeling girl, although a very spoilt one. The heart deep down underneath all her sillinesses and selfishnesses was warm enough really, and somehow the swift realization which came at the sight of her friend went straight to it.

She gave a little gasp which was half a sob.

'Honor, dear old girl!' and the next minute she was down in a heap by Honor's chair, and the two had their arms round each other, and Ethel had slipped from the room.

Ethel found her way back to the solitude of No. 4 study and there faced the facts. She had succeeded in doing even more than she had tried to do, she knew, for what she had just witnessed was a *real* reconciliation. The Liliás who had flung her pride to the winds like that would never again be the utterly self-centred Liliás of old times; now at last, for the first time, she appreciated and returned Honor's feeling for her.

'But I shall never have the chance now,' Ethel told herself. The special place in Honor's affection was, thanks to her, permanently filled—by Liliás. She, Ethel, had deliberately done away with any chance she had ever had of 'coming first.'

Honor had at last what she wanted—Liliás's love; but that meant that for Ethel there was now not the faintest hope of ever being anything but an unwanted 'extra.' The friendship she had so long coveted she had voluntarily given to Liliás, and now she herself must be permanently the odd number in No. 4 study.

But she had done it for Honor Lovel's sake, and that was something. It was a big thing that she had done for her friend, even if nobody knew—Honor least of all.



‘ Ethel, come here! I want you—we both want you! ’

Ethel went to the window and looked out, rather mistily, at the sunlight filtering through the trees, and any one who had seen her at that moment could not possibly have thought her insignificant-looking, the light in her plain little face was so intensely unselfish and sweet.

‘It’s—worth it,’ she said.

And at that moment she heard a girl’s voice at the door.

‘Ethel, could you just go to Honor for a minute before school? She’s in the sick-room with Liliás, and they want you.’

What was it now? Ethel wondered rather drearily, as she obeyed the summons. Did they want her to witness their re-union? Surely she would have enough of that!

Honor and Liliás were sitting very close together, and almost the first thing Ethel noticed was that Liliás had been crying—Liliás, who never cried, who never seemed to have anything to cry *for*. But it was Honor who spoke, eagerly stretching out her hands.

‘Ethel, come here! I want you—we both want you! Liliás and I have made it up, but it’s all thanks to you. She’s told me how you simply *made* her come to me, and how you took her place last night when you kissed me. Ethel, why did you do that?’

‘It was the only way to please you. You wanted Liliás, not *me*,’ Ethel returned simply, but rather bitterly.

‘I want you *both*,’ Honor protested. ‘Of course I want Liliás, but I want you too, Ethel. You don’t know what you’ve done for me.’

‘And I’ll just tell you what you’ve done for *me*,’ Liliás struck in, her voice sounding shaky. ‘You’ve made me see what a *pig* I’ve been! I haven’t been

thinking about anybody but myself ever; but *you*, you've thought about everybody *except* yourself. You've made us make it up, when I know you would much rather have had us keep quarrelling, so that you could get in with Honor yourself; and what we both want to say is that from now on we want to be chums with *you* just as much as with each other.'

'But you can't,' Ethel protested, though somehow the world seemed growing marvellously brighter. 'Two's company, three's none.'

'Ah, but the exception proves the rule,' Honor retorted in half-laughing earnest, 'and that's what we're going to show. We simply can't get on without you, Ethel, either of us; it just comes to that. Look what a hopeless muddle we were in before you stepped in and put us to rights. We haven't been a bit nice to you, I'm afraid; but when my eyes get well and I come back to the study, you'll see.'

'What a "happy family" we'll make of No. 4!' Liliás put in, beginning to smile again. 'We won't be "two and an extra" any more; we'll be——'

'A triple alliance!' Honor interrupted. She leaned suddenly towards Ethel. 'Ethel, dear old girl,' she said softly, 'you kissed me last night as proxy for Liliás; won't you do it now as *yourself*?'

And Ethel, as she gave the kiss, knew that she was no longer a mere odd number.

A GIRL determined to be a success in her new home, and she was.

THE HIDDEN CUPBOARD

By May Fielding.

BANG! There goes half-a-crown,' said Gertrude Hilton ruefully, as she looked at a pane of glass in the schoolroom window, which her ball had just shattered to fragments. 'It's just my luck.'

'Rubbish,' said Kate Brent, the head girl of the school. 'Luck's got nothing to do with it. You know perfectly well it is against the rules to throw balls near the house. I believe your brains are wool-gathering half your time, and that's why you are always getting into mischief. Pull yourself together, old dear.'

Gert sighed heavily. She was a bright young thing of fifteen; she looked rather all legs and arms, but gave one an instant impression that some day she would be well worth while looking at. Yet she was not a favourite with Miss Gate, the Head Mistress, or the other teachers, and was not popular with the girls, except Kate Brent, who had a strange pitying regard for her as she always seemed to be in scrapes, without having had the least idea of mischief.

'Well,' said Gertrude slowly, 'I just hate being at Fairfax House, where I am not quite on the same terms as other girls, and whenever I am not grinding at my lessons, my head is full of trying to think of some scheme for getting away, so I suppose I forget and break the rules.'

‘You won’t be able to leave school for another couple of years at the earliest,’ objected Kate.

‘I’m not so sure; girls of fifteen often have to earn their living, and Aunt Maria said at Christmas she was tired of paying my school bills.’

Kate knew that Gertrude was an orphan, and that her aunt, Mrs. Bond, had got Miss Gate to take her on reduced terms on condition of her making herself ‘useful.’

‘Look here,’ said Kate kindly, ‘go immediately to Miss Gate and tell her about the broken window. Most likely she’ll be in a good temper, for not long ago someone came to see her in a carriage and pair with a coronet on the door, and perhaps the visit means a new pupil. Run along and get it over, and then you’ll feel a lot better.’

Gertrude thought it good advice; and, supposing the visitor had gone, she burst into Miss Gates’ study without knocking, and surprised the principal in earnest conversation with a lady whose velvets and furs proclaimed her to be somebody of importance.

The unlucky girl would have beaten a hasty retreat, but Miss Gate drew her nearer and—oh, wonder of wonders!—the school mistress did not look in the least angry at the abrupt intrusion.

‘This is Gertrude, Mrs. Strong,’ she observed to the visitor.

The lady put up her lorgnette and surveyed the unlucky girl rather critically, but she spoke quite kindly:

‘She is not the least like the Hiltons.’

‘No,’ said Gertrude bluntly. ‘Uncle Sep always said I’m like mother. She was his sister, you know. That’s why he and Aunt Maria adopted me, though it was such an expense.’

‘I have been to see your uncle and aunt, Gertrude, and they are quite willing to give you up to my father—your grandfather—Lord Hilton. It is only lately we knew that my brother Claude had left a child. We want you to come and live with us at Oakdale Court. Miss Gate is willing for me to take you away with me now; so if you go and get ready we can start at once.’

The wonderful news quickly spread through the school, and Kate Brent came in to help Gertrude pack. That task finished, she gave her poor young friend some good advice:

‘Don’t take up fancies and persuade yourself you are so awkward and unfortunate that no one will care for you. Make a fresh start, Gert, and just determine you will be a success in your new home. Depend upon it, you’ll find someone to love and something to do. You’ve told me lots of times you wanted a chance to do something big; well, forget to go dreaming about the “big,” and do whatever first comes to hand.’

Ten minutes later Gertrude was driving away with the new-found aunt in the very carriage whose coronet had so aroused Kate Brent’s curiosity.

On the way the girl learned a good deal more of her own history.

It was only when Lord Hilton’s lawyer was making inquiries about some property near West Bay that he discovered the rector of the little village had a niece called ‘Gertrude Hilton,’ whose father had been called ‘Claude.’ The lawyer told Lord Hilton, who, once convinced the girl was his dead son’s child, made arrangements with Mr. and Mrs. Bond to give her up to him.

‘My father is getting an old man, Gertrude, and he has known a great deal of trouble. I hope you may bring a little sunshine into his life,’ said Mrs. Strong.

'Do you and my grandfather live all alone?' asked Gertrude.

'No; my niece, Isabel Vane, has lived with us ever since her mother's death, and until lately our house, Oakdale Court, was my nephew Gerald Leigh's home. Circumstances have changed this, and now my father is so angry with Gerald that his name is never spoken.'

Gertrude nodded gravely.

'I had the care of Gerry from his baby days, and love him almost as though he were my own boy, so you see, Gertrude, I miss him very much. I hope you will be very happy with us, my dear, but there are just two things about which I want you to be careful—never mention Gerry to your grandfather, or Isabel and'—here Mrs. Strong paused as though she had to choose her words, 'don't trust Isabel too much. She is a very pretty, attractive girl, but—she is not always quite sincere. If there is anything you want advice about, or any little difficulty wants smoothing, come to me, not to Isabel.'

It was only twelve miles by road to Oakdale Court, so Gertrude and her aunt drove the whole way, reaching the beautiful old house about six o'clock.

Her grandfather kissed Gertrude formally, and bade her welcome; then Mrs. Strong took her up to a pretty blue-and-white bedroom, where there was actually a fire burning, and a neat maid appeared to unpack the shabby little box which held Gertrude's whole wardrobe.

'I feel as though it were a wonderful dream, and I should wake up presently to find myself back in the bare old schoolroom at Fairfax House,' she said frankly when the maid had 'done' her hair and finished off her best dress (a rather worn black cashmere) with a fichu of soft lace, yellow with age.

‘I don’t think you need be afraid of that, Miss Gertrude. Now, will you go down to your aunt, or wait till the gong sounds?’

Gertrude chose the first alternative, and Janet showed her the way to the drawing-room. At first sight she thought the room empty, but someone came forward from behind a tall Oriental screen and put out her hand.

‘I suppose you are Gertrude. I am your Cousin Isabel.’

She was the loveliest creature Gertrude had ever seen. There were pretty girls among the seniors at Fairfax House, but Isabel Vane was simply beautiful—a tiny sylph-like figure with china-blue eyes, golden hair, and a pink-and-white complexion. She was twenty-one, but she looked seventeen.

At dinner, Lord Hilton devoted himself to Isabel. His daughter tried to draw Gertrude out, but finding her painfully shy, gave up the attempt, thinking it kinder to leave her to herself.

A little happening at dinner did more to open the girl’s eyes to her cousin’s falseness than any amount of warnings from her aunt.

Lord Hilton asked Isabel in a low tone, putting the question in French, what she thought of the new arrival, and Miss Vane replied in the same language, ‘She’s as awkward as a Hottentot, and the plainest girl I ever saw.’

Mrs. Strong saw the colour crimson Gertrude’s cheeks and guessed the girl knew enough French to understand the question and the answer.

It was settled that, as it was November, Gertrude should have a holiday until after the New Year. In January she must begin studies again, and then Mrs. Strong would either find a small home school, where

she could be 'finished,' or an accomplished governess to superintend her education at home with the help of visiting masters.

In the meantime Gertrude had no lessons to trouble her, and enjoyed life amazingly. She explored the beautiful old house thoroughly, and began to love it dearly. In the afternoon she generally went out with her aunt; in the morning, as a great honour, she was allowed to read the newspaper to her grandfather. Still there were plenty of lonely hours when she could dream about her own hopes, and cherish the earnest wish—which at Fairfax House had led her into forgetting duties and breaking rules—the wish to do something great.

Before she had been long at the Court, Gertrude found the portrait of Gerald Leigh in the picture gallery, and she was so pleased with the likeness of her unknown cousin that she persuaded the old house-keeper, with whom she was a prime favourite, to tell her the story of his disgrace.

'What did he do so very bad that grandfather sent him away?' Gertrude asked Mrs. Bates.

'If you ask *me*, missie, Mr. Gerald never did anything wrong, but he'd an enemy close at hand, who made things look pretty black against him. That enemy persuaded his lordship that his own grandson, whom he'd brought up from a baby, was—a thief.'

'But what was he accused of stealing?' demanded Gertrude. 'Bates, do put down your knitting and tell me about it.'

And at last Mrs. Bates was persuaded to tell the story.

'Mr. Gerry did great things in the war, Miss Gertrude. He wasn't wounded, so to say, but he had shell-shock badly, and when he came home safe and

sound, the master couldn't make enough of him. He made him agent of the estate, and trusted him in everything.

'His lordship wanted to have the family jewels reset, for Miss Isabel Vane to wear at a great ball she was going to in London. I've heard that Mrs. Strong and Mr. Gerald, neither of them, liked the idea. Your aunt said young girls ought not to wear priceless jewels, and Mr. Gerald thought that, seeing his cousin was not a "Hilton," she had no right to wear the family gems.

'Well, his lordship carried the day, and the jewels were trusted to Mr. Gerald to take to a London jeweller in Bond Street. That was when the awful thing happened; for when he got to the shop, the cases were empty—every one of the jewels had been taken out.'

'He must have been robbed on the journey up,' said Gertrude practically. 'Some jewel thief knew his errand to London and got into the same compartment in order to take the gems.'

Mrs. Bates shook her head.

'Mrs. Strong went up with her nephew, miss. She says he put the bag, with the jewel-cases inside, in the rack over his head and it was never touched till they reached Victoria Station. He put her into a taxi, and the last thing she saw of her nephew was, he was walking away *with the bag in his hand.*'

'Mrs. Bates, do tell me? When were the jewels last seen *in their cases?*'

'The night before. Lord Hilton, as you know, never leaves his room till nearly ten. Mr. Gerald was to start at eight, so his grandfather gave him the jewels in their cases overnight. Mrs. Strong saw Mr. Gerald put the cases into a small brief bag and go

upstairs with it in his hand. Mr. Gerry declared he never opened the bag again until he was at the jeweller's shop, but, of course, there was only his word for that, and the master doubted it.'

'It seems a dreadful shame,' said Gertrude. 'But, Bates, why hasn't grandfather sent for a detective, or offered a reward for the recovery of the jewels?'

'Because he believes Mr. Gerald guilty, and thinks to take any action might bring the crime home to him. The worst thing about it is that two days before the jewels were lost, Mr. Gerald asked his grandfather for a hundred pounds, which spiteful people say proves he was in want of money.'

'And did he get the hundred pounds?'

'No, Lord Hilton refused to advance it.'

'What is he doing now—Gerald, I mean?'

'The last time we heard, he was in London, acting as secretary to a physician, receiving patients, making appointments, and so on. Quite a respectable job, Miss Gertrude, but no sort of post for Lord Hilton's heir.'

Gerry was *not* his grandfather's heir. Mrs. Bates did not know that since the Honourable Claude Hilton had left a daughter, that daughter's claim to the estate was greater than that of his sister's son.

Gertrude could not get Mrs. Bates' story out of her head; it seemed to haunt her whenever she was alone and had time for what she called 'a good long think.'

Here was the 'great deed' she had dreamed of ready to hand, if only she could accomplish it—to clear Gerald's name and bring him back to his old home.

Gertrude puzzled over this till at times she was almost dazed, and Mrs. Strong, coming on the child

suddenly in the old schoolroom (which had been made over to her as a private sanctum) with puckered face and knitted eyebrows, asked what was troubling her.

‘I’m not exactly troubling, Aunt Hilda—only thinking. I’d like to do something awfully splendid, so that you and grandfather were ever so glad I came to live with you.’

Mrs. Strong smiled. She was growing very fond of Gertrude; there was something so absolutely honest and straight about the girl that she felt that, though she was not like the Hiltons in face, she was true to their motto: ‘Honour above all.’

‘My dear child, I don’t want you to do anything splendid, and I am glad already that you have come to live with us. Now I’ll tell you a piece of news. Your cousin Isabel is going to be married.’

‘Good gracious!’ exclaimed Gertrude in most unflattering surprise. ‘Oh, I hope the wedding will be soon.’

‘It will be in January. She is going to marry Mr. Munro of Kingswood.’

‘Oh!’ And there was such a stress on the word that Mrs. Strong felt astonished.

‘He is very rich,’ she went on, ‘and, as Mrs. Munro, Isabel will have every luxury at her command.’

She did not add that Isabel had refused the Scotsman in the days when she believed Gerald would marry her and she would share the Hilton property. At the time when her cousin refused to obey his grandfather in this respect, Isabel had been furious; but now that there was a nearer heir to the family honours than Gerald, she thought it just as well he had done so.

That night Gertrude lay awake for hours thinking.

It seemed to her that her head was so full of puzzles she should never sleep at all.

Why had Isabel accepted a prosy old man (Mr. Munro was over fifty)? She could not possibly love him. But how delightful it would be at Oakdale Court without her. And when her cousin was once gone, couldn't she—Gertrude—find some way of proving Gerald Leigh's innocence?

Hark! What was that?

Gertrude heard the sound of footsteps close at hand. Her bedroom had a balcony, from which a flight of steps led down to the garden, and now it seemed to the excited girl that someone had actually climbed up these stairs and was trying to get into her room.

Her heart went pit-a-pat for one moment; then she pulled herself together.

'What's the use of my longing to do something really great if I'm frightened of a burglar? I daresay the poor fellow is only looking for food. I've got ten shillings in my purse; I'll give it to him to go away.'

Gertrude sprang out of bed and put on her crimson dressing-gown. She was actually going to open the French window and demand what the intruder wanted, when the handle was turned from the outside, the window opened, and there entered—not a burglar, but Gerald Leigh! She recognized him at once from the picture.

'Good gracious!' said Gertrude. 'How in the world did you get in? I know that the gate at the foot of the stairs is always locked at night.'

'So it is; but in old times this was my room, and I had a duplicate key of the gate. I expect you are my cousin Gertrude?'

'Yes; and you are Gerald Leigh. I've thought

a lot about you. Won't you sit down and tell me what you want? You can't be starving, because Bates told me you'd quite a respectable job at a doctor's, although she did say it was exactly like a porter's.'

Gerald laughed, in spite of himself; this little cousin was so quaint and original.

'I had a most important reason for wanting to get into this room. Had I applied to my grandfather he would have refused me admission to his house, and my aunt would have wanted to know my reason before she agreed to let me in without his knowledge. I had the key of the garden stairs, and I never dreamed that Aunt Hilda would give my room to a stranger.'

'Well, now you are here, won't you tell me just what you wanted to do?' said Gertrude. 'There isn't a scrap of writing or anything else belonging to you left in the wardrobe or the chest of drawers.'

'How old are you, kiddie?'

'Turned fifteen—and I don't like being called "kiddie"; my name is Gertrude.'

'Then, Gertrude, can you keep a secret?'

'Yes, Honest Injun,' quoting a form of oath much in vogue in Fairfax House.

'Then, here goes, but—remember I trust you—I expect you've heard why I left Oakdale Court?'

'Mrs. Bates told me all she knew. She believes in you thoroughly—and so do I!'

'Thank you very much, kiddie, I mean, Gertrude. I'll try to explain why I'm here, and what I want. I was badly shell-shocked in the war. Do you know what that means?'

'Rather! Soldiers who've been shell-shocked are not quite like other people, and—sometimes have delusions.'

‘Just so! Well, Gertrude, Bates is right. I *have* got a job at a doctor’s, but he doesn’t treat me like a hall-porter. We went through the war together. He knows that one result of my being shell-shocked is that when I’m bothered, my memory clean goes. It’s only lately that I told Dr. Ashley what happened about the jewels—that is, that they had disappeared and I was accused of stealing them. He thinks that, being annoyed at having to take the jewels to be reset, and, anxious for their safety on the journey, I went to bed with my mind full of the danger of their loss, and that *in my sleep* I got up, took the jewels from their cases, and put them somewhere where I considered they would be more secure. Gertrude, I have not the slightest recollection of doing this, but the disappearance of the jewels has driven me almost frantic, and Ashley’s theory is the only explanation I have ever heard that fits the case. I thought if I came here and groped about in every possible and impossible hiding-place I might come on the lost jewels.’

Gertrude clapped her hands.

‘I’ll help you hunt, only——’ her face grew grave, ‘I know that the drawers of the wardrobe were empty when I came here.’

‘There are only two possible places I can think of,’ said Gerald. ‘The cupboard over the window, and the old bureau.’

‘I didn’t know there was a cupboard over the window.’

‘No, my grandfather was so anxious to get rid of any trace of his prodigal that he ordered this room to be re-papered and painted. I expect the workmen, thinking the cupboard would never be wanted, did not replace the brass handles it used to have.’

Gertrude helped her cousin to pull the dressing-table up to the window and plant a stool upon it. Mounted on this elevation, Gerald passed his hand eagerly about the surface of the wall till he found what had been the cupboard door; then he took out a penknife, and, by forcing the point into the wood-work, managed to pull open the door and plunge his hand into the cupboard.

He took out a large silk handkerchief, knotted at the corners, and a minute later displayed to Gertrude such a dazzling array of glittering jewels as almost frightened her by their brilliance.

‘At last! Oh, Gerald, aren’t you thankful?’

‘Very. Now, what shall I do next?’ He spoke more to himself than to the child. ‘Do them up and send them to my grandfather by registered post?’

‘Oh, no!’ cried the girl. ‘That would spoil it all. Don’t you see, people might persuade grandfather that you had had the jewels all the time, and only sent them back because you were afraid to sell them? You must let him find them just where they were.’

The wisdom of Gertrude’s advice was soon plain to Gerald.

‘You’ve got a head on your shoulders,’ he cried admiringly; ‘but my dear little girl, I don’t suppose the old man pays you a visit in your own room, and how are we to contrive for him to “find them”?’

‘I don’t know now, but if you will only give me a day to think things over I’ll find some way out.’

‘But remember, Gertrude, you ought to act soon—what if the jewels were stolen?’

‘They’ve been in that cupboard for months, so they can run the risk of another day or two,’ said Gertrude. ‘Gerald, grandfather will want to send for you at once, but who is to give him your address? If you

gave it to me he wouldn't like me to be the one to tell him.'

'Bates has got it. Well, Gertrude, I shall tramp the three miles to the railway station and catch the first train back to London.'

'You'll have to wait hours, and it's a bitter night; must you go away? Couldn't you creep into one of the empty rooms in this corridor and sleep comfortably?'

'No; the other place is safer. Child, if you knew the boon it is to me to be able to prove my innocence, you'd understand that I'd gladly spend nights instead of hours at a dismal railway station, just to feel my name was cleared.'

The clock struck two when Gerald Leigh, having carefully replaced the furniture, went noiselessly down down the garden stairs to the moonlit grounds.

'Gertrude! What on earth is the matter?' asked Lord Hilton of his younger grandchild, when the family met at breakfast and he noticed the dark rings round Gertrude's eyes and her pale, haggard face. 'You look as though you had been awake all night.'

'I've been awake most of it,' said Gertrude, 'for I had a most startling dream, and when I woke up I was afraid to go to sleep again.'

It was quite true; just before she heard those stealthy footsteps creeping up the garden stairs, Gertrude had dreamed that she found the jewels, and after Gerald left her she had never closed her eyes, because a nervous fancy had seized on her that someone else might creep up those same stairs and break into her room.

Lord Hilton was growing fond of Gertrude, because her frank, open nature reminded him of his son.

Besides, the girl was always trying to do him little kindly services such as would never have occurred to Isabel to offer him.

‘Gertrude,’ he said, after breakfast, when she had followed him unbidden into the library. ‘I want you to tell me all about your wonderful dream, child. If it was anything terrible, your aunt must find you another room.’

‘I can’t tell you much about my dream without disobeying you, grandfather, because I shall have to mention someone whose name is forbidden. I dreamed that I had found your lost jewels.’

‘You ought never to have heard anything about them,’ said the old man, sternly. ‘Well, where did you find them?’

‘In a cupboard in my room. It’s much too high up for me to look in there, but you are a tall man, and I thought perhaps if you went up there with me—when the room is empty no one would know—you might be able to open the cupboard. I’ve heard that people who’ve been shell-shocked walk in their sleep sometimes, and do things they forget all about when they are up. Supposing he put the jewels in the cupboard, they may have been there all the time.’

‘It’s a ridiculous idea, child. People ought not to have told you anything about the jewels.’

‘Grandfather, *do* come with me and look,’ pleaded the girl.

Lord Hilton gave way. But when he found where the cupboard was that Gertrude wanted to search, he said he could not possibly climb that height at his time of life; she’d better ring the bell and get the butler to send one of the men.

Bates, knowing what was at stake, brought a pair of steps and mounted to the top herself. Another

moment the cupboard door was open, and she came down with the jewels in triumph.

Lord Hilton went over them carefully; not one was missing, and in the handkerchief besides the jewels they found a letter to say the writer, a noted editor, enclosed a cheque for two hundred pounds for Mr. Leigh's MS. So it was explained how Gerald came to have plenty of ready money, in spite of having been so hardly pressed just before the loss of the jewels as to ask his grandfather for an advance of a hundred.

Lord Hilton told Mrs. Strong the story with tears in his eyes. They 'phoned to Gerry to come home at once; and the old grandfather 'sat on' Isabel Vane heavily when she tried to make out that the wonderful discovery did not prove Gerald's innocence at all.

Gerald Leigh came home and was greeted with joy and delight by every person at Oakdale Court, gentle and simple, except his Cousin Isabel. But as she was shortly to leave her grandfather's home for her husband's house, perhaps *her* coolness did not matter.

And Gertrude Hilton, the awkward, unlucky girl, who had always been making mistakes and getting into scrapes at Fairfax House, had gained her end and done something great at last.

A GHOSTLY prank leads a
burglar to reform.

THE GHOST AND THE BURGLAR

By Claire Badderley.

‘THE square on the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides.’

Peggy dreamily assured herself of this important fact for the twentieth time, as she sat by the open schoolroom window, with her eyes on the cherry tree that was bursting into a foam of white blossom in the garden below. Through the trees she had a glimpse of the playing field, where a House cricket match was in progress; the school Brownie Pack, who were going for a picnic that afternoon, were collecting at the back of the Pavilion, seething excitedly round the Brown Owl.

Peggy herself was going with Mademoiselle and two other sufferers to spend an hour in the dentist’s chair, and with Senior Cambridge only three weeks ahead, had decided to give the free hour before she started to the brushing-up of her Geometry. But the weather was not conducive to concentrated effort, and after half-an-hour of half-hearted study, Peggy closed her book and started upstairs to dress.

As she passed the open door to the garden she ran down the steps for a moment to get a closer view of the cherry-tree. Then she strolled down to the end of the terrace just to see how the lilacs were opening,

and from there it was only a step to the kitchen-garden, with its pink-tipped apple-trees. Before she knew where she was Peggy found herself sitting on the stone wall at the end of the orchard. Behind her lay the grounds of St. Audrey's. Before her was the world.

She sat on the top of the wall and dangled her feet out of bounds. The very most scandalous crime that one could commit at St. Audrey's was to go out of bounds without permission. Peggy, a member of the First Eleven, with a school Prefectorship awaiting her when she came back after the summer holidays, sat and gazed at the forbidden land. She knew that she had no time to waste if she were to be ready to meet Mademoiselle and her fellow-victims at a quarter to three, and still she sat and dreamed. Then across the fields, on the high road, she spied the Head Mistress's car which was to take Mademoiselle and her charges to the station, and remembered that she had forgotten to report to Mademoiselle that she was going, and that Mademoiselle, accordingly, would not be missing her. At school, of course, they would think she had gone, and so they, too, would not be missing her.

By an almost unbelievable combination of circumstances, she was free!

For a moment Peggy sat irresolute, then, stifling a severe qualm of conscience, she slid over the wall, a joyous young mutineer seeking adventure, and gave herself up to the intoxicating joy of feeling free. Down the steep pasture she raced, over a stile and across a strip of marshy meadow, till she came to the brook at the foot of the hill fields. It was a clear little brook with a sandy bed, which had not too many stones in it, and, tearing off her shoes and

stockings, Peggy followed it joyously through a strip of tangled woodland till it disappeared through a tunnel in a great yew hedge which completely cut off all further view.

Peggy regarded the green tunnel critically, then, selecting the least boggy bank, she promptly lay down and wriggled through stomach-wise, tearing only a small hole in the shoulder of her school blouse. She was still in a wood, but a very different kind of wood from the tangled wilderness which she had left outside. The brook flowed sedately between fern-bordered banks, under rustic bridges, and widened occasionally into pools carpeted with lily pads. Mossy paths set with stepping-stones led off mysteriously into the shrubbery, and the grass between the bushes was starred with daffodils. Obviously it was part of some private grounds, though the whole place spoke of disuse and neglect. The dead branches from the shrubbery overhung the grass-grown paths, the wooden bridges were badly in need of repair, and the sweep of the wood was broken by great irregular gaps where the trees had been mercilessly cut down.

For a moment Peggy hesitated, then, telling herself that they couldn't do anything but turn her out if they did catch her, she carefully crossed the first rustic bridge. Then, choosing the least overgrown path, she proceeded to follow its windings until the wood ended abruptly in a large kitchen garden with neat plots of vegetables bordered by currant bushes, and surrounded on three sides by a high brick wall.

A gardener was engaged with his back toward Peggy, setting out baby lettuces; he was dressed in breeches and leather leggings, with an old golf jacket and a cap on the side of his head. Peggy studied him dubiously, divided between a prompting

to run and a desire to be friendly. Then friendliness conquered, and she sat down on his wheelbarrow and watched him, while she thought of an opening remark. Then the gardener looked up suddenly and saw her, and nearly overbalanced in his surprise.

‘Good-afternoon,’ said Peggy pleasantly.

‘Um,’ grunted the gardener. ‘What are you doing there?’

‘Watching you plant lettuces.’

The gardener stood up and took a step towards her. When he straightened himself he was very upright, and Peggy had to look up quite a long way into the thin, keen face.

‘Where did you come from?’ he asked not unkindly.

‘Through the wood,’ she answered, waving her hand vaguely westward.

Her companion glanced at the embroidered monogram on the pocket of her navy blue blazer and drew his own conclusions.

‘Are the young ladies of St. Audrey’s usually allowed to walk into other people’s ground without permission?’

Peggy twinkled.

‘No,’ she answered candidly. ‘We’re never allowed outside the grounds without permission. But at school they think I’ve gone to the dentist’s with Mademoiselle, and she thinks I’m playing cricket. So I thought I’d explore the source of the brook at the bottom of our pasture, and you see it brought me here.’

‘And now you are here——?’

‘Well, can’t I help you plant your lettuces? I really do know a bit about gardening. We have classes in it at school.’

‘Well, yes, thank you.’

He accepted her offer with unexpected cordiality, and explained the method of planting baby lettuces with great care. Peggy followed along in the next row three feet behind him, and by the end of fifteen minutes they were quite old friends. The talk ranged far—from school over politics, life and morals. He was very well-informed for a gardener—read the papers, and had very decided opinions on most subjects.

A spirited account by Peggy of the various methods of discipline practised by the staff of St. Audrey’s, led the conversation to a wireless lecture given the week before by a famous literary critic on the treatment of criminals, and both she and her companion heartily agreed with the somewhat unusual opinions expressed by the lecturer.

‘Wasn’t it topping at the end when he spoke to the burglar that he’d caught and helped to escape and asked him to come and see him?’ said Peggy enthusiastically. ‘I wonder if A.J.S. was listening. I should think if he was he’d feel pretty bucked to feel he’d got a friend like that.’

‘Yes,’ agreed her companion. ‘A great many of the worst criminals would have been quite good fellows if it hadn’t been for the accident of circumstance. They’re weak a bit, of course, and then there comes a sudden overwhelming temptation just at a moment when things are going badly with them, and the thing is done.’

Peggy nodded understandingly.

‘Yes, that’s true. It’s mostly chance that makes people bad. I know it is in my own case, anyhow! This afternoon, for instance, I had every intention of revising my geometry for the Senior, and going to

the dentist's with Mademoiselle, and yet here I am! So you ought always to be kind to criminals like Mr. H——, and remember that under different circumstances you might have been a burglar yourself.'

Her companion smiled agreement.

'Yes,' he said, 'that point of view has always appealed to me. I—er—my employer—that is, Captain Evelyn, believes in giving a man a chance. In fact I remember he had a valet once who was an ex-forgery. He turned out excellently.'

Peggy looked up with sudden interest.

"Captain Evelyn?" Then this must be Wyndicotes? The Magpie was telling us about it only the other day. It belonged to his uncle, didn't it—a queer old man who hoarded his money and kept hardly any servants and let the whole place go to rack and ruin until the two rooms he lived in were the only watertight ones in the whole place. The Magpie said he didn't approve of war, and never forgave his nephew for being a soldier. He couldn't stop him coming into the property because it was entailed, so he just let the whole place go to pieces, and wouldn't have so much as a tile put on the roof.'

Her companion's face had grown very stern.

'Yes,' he said shortly, 'but far worse than that was the cutting down of the trees in the park. The house can be restored, though it's going to take half a lifetime to do it, but to cut down the timber was damnable, for it can never be replaced.'

'A penny, please!' Peggy held out her hand.

'What for?'

'That "damnable." Every time you use slang you have to put a penny in the missionary box. And "Damn" is much worse than slang, it's swearing, so

you really ought to put threepence, but I'll let you off with a penny, as it's the first time.'

'Thank you.'

He gravely produced one, and Peggy put it into the pocket of her blue school blazer.

'What sort of things do they teach you at that school?'

'The square on the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides.' Peggy obligingly repeated the proposition she had been revising that afternoon.

'And what sort of use do they think that stuff's going to be to you?'

'Any amount of use—on examination day.'

'How do you come to know so much about social questions?'

'Oh, we have lectures on them, and on Fridays we have to talk at meal times on current topics, so every one reads up the leading articles.'

She skilfully pressed the earth round the roots of her last lettuce, and rose to her feet somewhat unsteadily.

'I don't know what time it is, but I've a feeling I ought to be going.'

He consulted a small wrist watch.

'Half-past four. Er—I suppose you wouldn't care for some tea first? That's a very comfortable seat under the pear-tree, and I could have it out here in ten minutes.'

Planting lettuces is hungry work, and Peggy suddenly realized that she was simply starving.

'Oh, could you?' she asked gratefully. 'Only you won't be longer, will you, because I must be back by five o'clock, when they come from the station, and then perhaps I can slip in without being missed.'

'I'll see what the gardener's cottage can produce in that time,' her companion assured her.

He was back in less than the ten minutes, lugging a huge hamper, which Peggy joyfully helped him unpack, setting out its contents on a small green garden table which he fetched from a shed. There were cress sandwiches, egg sandwiches, shortbread, milk, tea in a thermos, and, best of all, a gingerbread hot from the oven.

'What a perfectly ripping spread!'

Her companion held out his hand.

'A penny!'

Peggy laughed, and handed him back his own.

'No, but you've got to be at boarding-school to realize how heavenly it is to have a meal like this, away from everybody. Breaking bounds, trespassing on a private estate, planting lettuces and having picnics in the kitchen garden—why, I haven't had such a dizzying whirl of adventures since my brother and I were small and used to go off together. Why is it that the greatest fun in the world is to run away from things you ought to do?'

Her companion laughed appreciatively. He seemed to enjoy the sensation of offering tea to a runaway schoolgirl, and the meal was progressing merrily, when the sound of a footstep made Peggy start and turn round guiltily, to see a groom coming up the gravel path towards them with a telegram in his hand.

'Beg pardon, sir,' he said apologetically, 'but this telegram came, and Bowden thought it might be important, so he said I was to find you, sir.'

The gardener tore open the orange-coloured envelope, and ran his eye over the contents.

'All right, there's no reply,' he said shortly, and

then turned round to look at his companion, who had hidden her head on the back of the stone seat in a gale of laughter.

‘I say,’ she said penitently, ‘I’m afraid I said some awfully rude things about your uncle. Of course, I knew as soon as you spoke you weren’t an ordinary gardener, but you find people doing such unexpected things these days, and somehow it never dawned on me that you were Captain Evelyn.’

Her companion laughed heartily.

‘Don’t you bother about that,’ he reassured her. ‘I’ve enjoyed myself immensely. ‘And now, what about letting me drive you back to school?’

‘Oh, I’d love it,’ said Peggy wistfully. ‘But you see—someone might see me. I’m afraid—it wouldn’t be wise.’

‘Perhaps you’re right.’

He escorted her back to the edge of the wood, and they shook hands solemnly.

‘Good-bye, I’ve enjoyed it all tremendously, especially the gingerbread. And if I ever have any criminal friends wanting a situation, may I send them to you?’

‘Do,’ replied Captain Evelyn gravely.

Peggy turned and ran.

In the common-room that evening, the conversation turned to ghost stories. Cecily Hamilton, a fat, unsuspecting, and rather unintelligent member of the Upper IVth, had been relating one or two highly-coloured incidents, which were not stories, but things which had really happened to people she knew. Rosemary Fielding, a matter-of-fact individual, who had just achieved the 1st Eleven, and was feeling rather superior in consequence, cut scornfully into Cecily’s reminiscences.

'What nonsense you talk, Cecily. As though any one to-day believes in such things. The thing your grandfather saw was probably a white cow, or the trunk of a silver birch-tree. If I saw a ghost, I should know at once that it was a practical joke, and I should go up and give it a jolly good shaking, that's what I should do.'

'I wonder!'

Peggy's voice was frankly disbelieving. She herself had a healthy scorn of Cecily's nonsense, but she could not stand Rosemary's airs of superiority.

'What you mean, Peggy Hyatt?' Rosemary turned on her angrily.

'I mean that if you woke up in the middle of the night and saw a ghostly figure with gleaming eyes standing at the end of your bedstead, you'd just sit up and scream for help like anybody else!'

'I wouldn't!'

'You wouldn't be frightened?'

'Of course not!'

The ringing of the prayers bell put a timely end to the conversation, but a brilliant idea was beginning to take shape in Peggy's fertile brain. On the way to the dining-room she waylaid her bosom friends, Helen Dixon and Patricia Carey, and proceeded to unfold to them the details of her plan.

'If Rosemary wants a ghost she shall have one. Only I shall want you two to help me. Are you game?'

They assured her that they were, with whole-hearted enthusiasm, then slipped quickly into single file as the mistress on duty came round the corner of the stairs.

After 'lights-out' that night, when Matron had made her last rounds and everything was quiet,

Peggy, fully dressed under her nightdress, threw off the cover of her bed and slipped on to the floor. Stealthily her room-mates joined her, and, with the help of the moonlight which poured through the window, they draped the sheet from her bed artistically round her, and secured the folds with safety pins. A pillow was slipped over her head and the corners tied into ears, then a nose and eyes were cut, and a grinning mouth and fearsome eyebrows cleverly added by Patricia with a tube of vermilion paint and a burnt cork. It took some time to make all these preparations, and it was nearly half past eleven before the ghost was ready to walk.

‘Now I’m ready!’ whispered Peggy gleefully, regarding herself in the full length mirror with entire satisfaction. ‘Don’t forget to leave the door open, and listen for me coming back.’

‘What shall you do if she screams?’

‘She won’t scream! She’s going to come up to me and shake me!’

‘Um—m—m!’

Patricia’s voice was distinctly disbelieving.

‘If she does I shall just make a bolt for it and dive under the bedclothes. See that they’re turned right down so that I can get in easily! It’s the luckiest thing in the world that Pamela’s in the sick room. I daren’t have risked it if she’d been sleeping there.’

Peggy glided down the corridor, slid noiselessly up the short flight of stairs to the upper landing, and slipping into Rosemary’s bedroom, arranged herself artistically in a patch of moonlight at the end of the bed. A sepulchral groan failing to rouse the soundly sleeping Rosemary, Peggy shook the end of the bed with such violence that Rosemary rolled over and clutched the bedclothes with a frenzied jerk. Then

as the ghost waved her white arms, she sat up in bed and gave forth shriek after shriek of such ear-splitting intensity that Peggy stood for a moment too aghast to move. Then, gathering up her trailing skirts in her hand, she turned and ran.

But Rosemary's shrieks had awakened everybody—doors were banging and frightened voices demanding the cause of the tumult. Peggy had reached the bottom of the stairs, and was just about to make a quick dash for her own room, when the Prefect in charge of the landing, in a gay silk kimono, appeared at the end of the corridor. Hastily Peggy turned back upstairs again. With a gasp of terror she realized she was in a trap. She pantingly tugged at the pillow case, but Patricia had tied it firmly, and the knot was behind. Even if she could remove her disguise she was lost if any one found her, for not even Peggy's lively imagination could invent an excuse for appearing in a white evening dress at twelve o'clock at night.

Below her the cry of 'Burglars!' was growing louder. A dozen voices were calling for matches, but no one seemed able to find any, and upstairs Rosemary was still wailing hysterically,

'I saw a ghost! I saw a ghost!'

At the end of the upper corridor a back staircase led down to the kitchen and laundry. By no possible means could she get back to her bedroom, but if she could reach the servants' quarters she might possibly manage to hide until the excitement was over and every one had gone back to bed. Dashing along the dark corridor she reached the stairs in safety, ran down them, and opened the door of a large store-room where the properties of the dramatic society were kept. One minute earlier a man had entered

the same room by the opposite door, and had just cast a look of boundless relief round its moonlit emptiness when Peggy burst into the room. He flattened himself against the wall and passed the back of his hand over his eyes.

'Mother of Mike!' he choked. 'What the —— have I got into?'

Peggy was very uncomfortable. It was terribly hot inside the pillow case, and she could only see out of one eye, but she took command of the situation in her usual self-possessed way.

'I suppose,' she said calmly, 'that you are the burglar. I am the ghost.'

He muttered something inaudible under his breath.

'Is this a bloomin' insane asylum?'

'No, only a girls' school,' Peggy assured him sweetly. 'Quick, they'll be here in a minute. I know a place to hide.'

She stooped low, and dived under a pile of canvas, and he followed her just as someone opened the door of the storeroom and flashed an electric torch round the room. Then the door banged, and the footsteps retreated, and Peggy, sitting down on the stump of a property tree, rocked backwards and forwards in a gale of hysterical laughter, stuffing her sheet into her mouth to prevent her from giggling audibly.

The burglar's teeth were chattering.

'Lord! It's all very well for you to laugh, Miss, but it means prison for me.'

Peggy sobered instantly.

'It would probably mean expulsion for me,' she said seriously. 'I say, could you untie that pillow case. I'm simply stifling.'

He worked obediently at the knot with hands that

trembled, and Peggy came out into the open with a sigh of relief.

'That's better,' she said, breathlessly. Then she looked at her companion curiously.

'Do you mind telling me how you came to be a burglar? It's obvious you're not a very experienced one. And then I'll tell you how I came to be a ghost.'

He told his story sullenly—no one had ever believed him yet, and he did not expect a schoolgirl to. And lacking the imagination to make it sound more in his favour, he just lamely told the truth. It was an all too common story—bad companionship, noted and disapproved of by his employers, a glass of drugged beer, and conviction for a burglary of which he knew nothing, with the result that he was sent to prison for a couple of months.

'And when I came out of course I couldn't get no work,' he ended bitterly.

Peggy looked at him seriously.

'If I get you a job, will you promise to go straight and not get mixed up with any more bad companions?'

The burglar grinned feebly.

'Sure an' I would. But I guess you'll not be finding any one who'll be wanting a jail bird like me.'

Peggy gathered her sheets about her and, diving into a chest in a corner of the store-room, unearthed some silver paper with a white backing that was used for covering shields and crowns.

'Have you got a pencil? I'm going to write you a letter of introduction?'

He produced a broken stub, watching her the while wonderingly.

Peggy wrote a hasty note on the lid of the chest

by the moonlight. Then, making an impromptu envelope, still of the silver paper, she addressed it to Captain Evelyn, Wyndicotes Grange, St. Albans, and handed him note and envelope to read.

'There,' she said, 'if you're game and present this letter, you'll get a job in a thousand, and if you're too much of a coward to, then you can go on being a burglar for the rest of your life.'

The man looked at her with painful anxiety.

'You're sure it's on the straight, Miss? You ain't handing me over to the coppers?'

'It's on the straight.'

She opened the storeroom window and waved her hand towards freedom and the outside world.

'Good-bye, Miss, and thank you.'

'Good-bye—and good luck.'

Peggy closed the window and, creeping cautiously through the shadowy passages, found her way to the front stairs. Her own corridor was deserted, and, hastily undressing and slipping into a kimono, she joined the hysterical group outside Rosemary's room, rubbing her eyes.

'What is it?' she said. 'Has there been a fire?'

'No—a ghost,' answered Patricia expressively, 'or a burglar.'

Peggy gave a little wail of despair.

'Oh, why didn't you call me,' she said. 'I've wanted to see a burglar all my life!'

Three weeks later, Peggy and Patricia, returning with Mademoiselle from a shopping expedition, passed the dilapidated gates of Wyndicotes just as a big grey Daimler turned out of the grass-grown drive with a tall, soldierly figure sitting inside. Peggy, dignified and gracious, acknowledged Captain Evelyn's salute in her best grown-up manner.

As the big car slipped past them, her gaze met that of the smart young chauffeur who sat at the wheel, and held it just long enough to catch the look of grateful recognition which leapt into his eyes.

HOW a girl fought against unfairness, and won.

THE REBELLION OF PHYLLIS

By Marjorie Wynne.

PHYLLIS was known by sight to her companions for nearly a year before she entered the school gates, and generally referred to among them as 'that lonely girl opposite,' or occasionally as 'that awfully pretty girl over the way.' She lived in a dark, rambling old house facing the school, and the girls often used to see her going in or out through the rusty gates, looking from the windows, or working in the garden, but always alone. The light, active figure, and the dark, bright, earnest face was familiar to them all, and one—Frieda Nickleson—knew her personally.

Frieda went to the school daily, returning in the evenings to her home at the rectory. She had first met Phyllis Caruth at a garden party, had since become intimate with her, and often penetrated past the iron gates into the dismal-looking abode beyond. Frieda brought back to school strange tales of empty echoing chambers and long, musty corridors, and especially of two awe-inspiring rooms—the one laboratory, the other library—where Phyllis's guardian, 'the Professor,' was wont to pass his days.

The two girls used to play games in the neglected garden—which was poor sport for Frieda, since Phyllis invariably won—and on winter evenings would

have tea together in the oak-panelled dining room, so dark and vast that it made Frieda quake to think of Phyllis passing long, solitary evenings there.

Again and again she urged her friend to forsake such loneliness for the cheerfulness of Roscombe School, and Phyllis, no less eager, had at last got her way.

The two girls were sitting together by firelight one evening, talking over this pleasing turn of affairs.

'Aren't you glad you're coming next term?' asked Frieda, for about the tenth time.

'Thankful!' was the eager answer. Phyllis was always enthusiastic. 'I shall simply love it, I know. Don't warn me not to make too sure. Of course, I don't expect to have a particularly good time while I'm a new girl, but at all events it won't be lonely like this. I could put up with a good deal, only to get rid of winter evenings here. Do you know what they're generally like, Frieda? The maid brings my tea at four o'clock, and I have it all by myself, then I have my lessons to do—but I never can manage to spin them out over more than an hour or two. Afterwards I roam over the house or else read, crouched up to the fire for company, and wishing I had a dog here, or anything alive. Supper's supposed to be at seven, but my guardian generally delays about an hour while everything gets cold. When he wanders in we have it together, he at one end of the huge table and I at the other, and hardly ever speaking, except when he asks me abstruse scientific questions that I can't answer. And when it's done he wanders back to his library, without even saying "good-night" to me. But you mustn't suppose, Frieda,' added Phyllis quickly, 'that I am ill-treated or anything. My guardian is queer and absent-minded, but not at all

unkind, and you mustn't think him so—it wouldn't be fair.'

Frieda laughed a little; she knew that phrase, 'It wouldn't be fair,' so very well. It was a watchword with Phyllis, whose strongest characteristic was her passion for justice.

'Well,' pursued Phyllis, 'that's my average evening—quite comfortable, and all that, but so dreadfully dull. Now tell me the sort of thing that would happen at school.'

'In the evenings? One of the boarders could tell you better—I'm only a day-girl, you know. But I believe the boarders do "preparation" in the big hall till half-past six——'

'All of them together?' put in Phyllis eagerly.

'Yes; oh, you'll have enough people round you—you can generally manage to sit next to your particular friend, whoever she happens to be. After "prep" you change into evening frocks, have supper at seven, and after that—well, there's dancing three times a week, I believe.'

'Lovely!' commented Phyllis rapturously, her foot involuntarily tapping the floor.

'Other nights they play games, or help the school mission (that's making toys for poor children), or act impromptu charades.'

'What fun! Oh, how I should revel in it! Don't you?'

'I?' returned Frieda. 'Oh, I don't come in for any of that sort of thing, being a day-girl; I only speak from hearsay. The boarders have a very good time, I believe.'

There was a note of bitterness and irritation in her voice.

'Yes, I shall love it,' insisted Phyllis. 'Fancy not

being lonely any more! I can't stand this. You see, it's not as if I were one of those clever, dreamy sort of people who like mooning about by themselves. I'm just an ordinary sort of person, athletic and sociable; I like to be one of a crowd and I like fun'—her eyes gleamed—'games, and dancing, and theatricals and all that. That's one of the biggest reasons why I want to go to school—to have someone to play with. What a baby I am! Don't you think so, considering I'm sixteen?'

'Oh! I don't know,' said Frieda absently. 'Fun? Games? Sociability? Oh, yes; I daresay you'll have plenty of those. You'll be one of the elect, you see—you'll be a boarder. I wish I were.'

Phyllis looked at her quickly.

'Why?' she asked softly. 'Aren't you happy at home, either?'

Neither of them saw the pathos of that 'either.' Frieda, sitting on the fender, glanced up at Phyllis leaning against the mantelpiece—at the earnest gipsy face, in which the eyes glowed, dark and bright, under eyebrows darker still. The firelight had found out a glint of red in her brown curls. She looked a good sort of person to confide in, Frieda decided, little knowing that she was about to bring a long-felt wrong before the one person who could and would redress it.

'At home?' she repeated. 'Oh, yes; I'm happy enough there. It's at school—as a day-girl—that I'm not happy. Look here, Phyl; it won't affect you because, as I said, you're going to be one of the elect, but it's too utterly sickening the difference that is made at the school between day-girls and boarders. The mistresses do it as much as the girls—treat the boarders as forming the school of themselves and us

day-girls as mere extras—inferior beings, who don't count.'

'But why?' demanded Phyllis hotly. 'That isn't fair!'

'Fair?' returned Frieda. 'My dear girl, Roscombe is a nice school in most ways, but if you expect to find perfect fairness you'll be disappointed. Of course, it isn't fair, but it's fact. You see, Roscombe is practically a boarding school; there are three or four times as many boarders as day-girls. They are the important party, everything is arranged to suit their convenience, and most of the clubs are reserved for them; so that we poor day-girls get full share of the work with hardly any fun. And not only that, but, of course, being placed on a pinnacle like that, the boarders get to feel themselves superior beings, and snub us. Oh, it's absolutely sickening!'

Phyllis's cheeks flushed.

'It's worse than unfair. It's no crime to be a day-girl.'

'No, but it's treated as one. There's nothing unique about it; you'll find the same at almost any school, though I think that Roscombe is worse than most.'

'I won't stand it, though, when I come to school,' declared Phyllis. 'I shall alter things—I will.'

'You can't,' returned Frieda despondently. 'You might perhaps if you were a day-girl; but one boarder among fifty can't make much difference.'

'Very well,' said Phyllis quietly. 'Then I'll get my guardian to send me as a day-girl instead.'

Frieda was startled; Phyllis had made the offer as simply as though it involved no sacrifice.

'You can't, Phyl!' she said quickly. 'That would spoil it all for you. Why, if you were a day-girl you

would have your lonely evenings and all that just the same as ever; you mustn't do it.'

'I must,' returned Phyllis steadily. '*I—I* can't stand any sort of *unfairness*, Frieda. You don't know how I feel about it. No, I'm going to be one of the day-girls, and get them their rights, or know the reason why. *When I've succeeded* I'll come altogether, but not before!'

Frieda gazed at her friend. She looked at that moment fit for a leader; the soul that must champion the oppressed, that must fight for ever on the losing side, rang in her voice; the spirit of the Marseillaise blazed out of her dark eyes.

Frieda rose quickly and laid a hand on her shoulder.

'You mustn't, Phyl,' she said quickly. 'Why should you sacrifice yourself for us? Besides, you don't know that you *can* succeed.'

'I don't know if I can,' said Phyllis, 'but I know I *will*!'

On the first day of the Easter term there walked into Roscombe school, in the company of Frieda Nickleson, a bright, gipsy-looking girl, who looked about her with an air of frank friendliness and intense interest, very different from the shy timidity of the average new girl. She answered merrily the usual string of questions relating to her age, family attainments, &c., &c., and so baffled all banter by quick, lively repartee that she suffered much less than was (according to the hospitable creed of most schools) her due as a stranger.

School-girls are quick to take likes and dislikes; at the end of her first morning Phyllis Caruth had won golden opinions, which, however, diminished considerably when, in reply to the question 'Are you a boarder?' she answered 'No.'

Phyllis had known herself truly when she declared that her bent was for social life and physical rather than mental attainments. She was an intelligent girl, but had been badly educated, and although she worked honestly, and hard, it was undoubtedly outside the book-world that her true *metier* lay. There she excelled; she soon proved herself brilliant at all games, a good dancer, and a capital actress. Blessed with a charming contralto voice, she might easily have become somewhat of a 'star' at the school, had not her abilities been given such exceedingly limited scope.

On the second day of her arrival, two or three elder girls had strolled up to her, and the tallest and eldest had addressed her with the patronage proper towards a new day-girl.

'I say, you new girl—what's your name? Would you care to join the hockey-club?'

Hockey, cricket and tennis were almost the only amusements in which day-girls as well as boarders, participated.

'Yes, please,' answered Phyllis promptly; 'and I want to join the Dramatic Club as well, and the Mission, and the Musical Society, and the Debating Society, and——'

A storm of giggling interrupted her.

'I dare say you do,' said the tall girl amusedly, 'but you can't, my child. Those things are reserved for your betters—except the Mission,' added Flora, suddenly remembering that she was treasurer of that institution. 'You can join that, of course, and I hope you will.'

'Thanks,' returned Phyllis, 'but I want to join all the other things too.'

Flora turned round to her companions.

'Pretty cool, isn't it?' she remarked, and the chorus giggled obediently. Then she faced the daring new girl once more.

'You can't,' she said sharply. 'You can join hockey, and the Mission, but nothing else.'

'Why?' demanded Phyllis. 'I've as much right
——'

'Because you're only a day-girl, and day-girls don't.'

'Why don't they?'

Somehow that definite 'why?' was rather disconcerting, and the steadiness of the bright dark eyes still more so.

Flora shuffled a little and hesitated.

'Oh, because—well—' she began lamely, when one of her supporters struck in; 'Because they're only insignificant little day-girls, that's why!' she said.

And the trio turned away, rather hastily, leaving Phyllis ablaze with indignation.

'Cheeky kid!' commented Flora, who was feeling extremely uncomfortable. 'I wish I could keep her out of hockey too.'

The others agreed with her; but they changed their minds later that afternoon when Phyllis, playing half-back with *éclat*, had scored every goal, and won her side a signal victory.

Dauntless and determined, Phyllis now gave all her superabundant energies to a fierce fight against the prevailing system of partiality and injustice. She speedily gained for herself the nickname of the 'Rebel'; but she was not alone, for other malcontent day-girls, having discovered a leader in her, were ready enough to join her in asserting themselves and struggling for their rights. But the victory was far off.

Meantime, the girl continued to go backwards and forwards between the school and the gloomy house opposite, finding enmity at the one and utter loneliness at the other. No one knew how wistfully, on dreary, solitary evenings, she would watch the lights opposite, and hear the gay sounds of the music, dancing, and girlish merriment, from which she was voluntarily shut off; nor how weary she grew of war.

One triumph, however, she had. Debarred from sharing in any amusements except an occasional game of hockey, at that one thing she proved herself marvellously expert, and wrung plaudits even from her enemies.

‘If you were a boarder, Phyl,’ Frieda told her bitterly, ‘you’d have been put into the team long ago, and the school would win twice as many games!’

Roscombe especially prided itself on its successes in games, and regarded hockey its *chef d’œuvre*. The present was an extremely interesting crisis, for the great game of the year was approaching, and victory would place Roscombe higher in the hockey lists than any other school in England. Hence, what befell Phyllis Caruth!

One morning, at the luncheon hour, Flora, the hockey captain, with her various satellites, approached Phyllis.

‘Look here, Phyllis,’ she announced importantly. ‘I’ve got something to tell you. You’re playing for the school against Northcote on Saturday week.’

A gasp, a thrill, ran through the groups of listening girls. A newcomer—and a *day-girl*—to play for the school in the chief match of the season! Such a thing had never been heard of.

For a moment the expected triumph and delight

flashed into Phyllis's face, but it vanished, leaving a queer expression.

'No, I'm not,' she said quietly.

Flora's expression became more amiable; the girl could not realize her stupendous good fortune.

'Oh, yes, you are,' she said patronizingly. 'Mind you play up! Practices will be——'

'I won't play, thank you,' interrupted Phyllis steadily.

Stupefaction fell upon the auditors.

'*What?*' gasped Flora. 'Do you mean to say——'

'I mean to say I *won't* play.'

'Oh, indeed!' sneered Flora, recovering herself with difficulty. 'Perhaps you will be kind enough to tell us why?'

'Yes, I will!' Phyllis flung back her head, and faced her audience with blazing eyes. 'Look here—this is why! I'm a day-girl—I represent the day-girls; and if they'll stand the way they're treated here, I *won't*! You boarders seem to think yourselves goddesses. You despise us, and bully us, and keep us out of everything, and then expect us to support you. All through the term I've been urging you to let me share in the things the school does, and you've only snubbed me; but now that you want my help you're ready enough to let me give it, and seem to think I shall jump at the chance. Well, you're mistaken.'

'Most people,' retorted Flora cuttingly, 'would rather like to represent the school—patriotically!'

'Represent the school!' cried Phyllis. 'But that's just what I'm not allowed to do—what you prevent me from doing. And you dare to talk to me about patriotism! Give me a fair equal chance—let me feel that I do count as part of the school, and do represent it, and I'll work hard, or play hard, or do anything

else for it; but not before!' concluded Phyllis in a final burst of indignation.

There was an applauding murmur from the delighted day-girls.

Flora, hot and crimson, shrugged her shoulders, saying scornfully, 'Oh, please yourself, of course,' and swept from the room.

But she had scarcely reached the door when a quick touch fell on her arm, and a freckled, horrified face looked into hers. It was Maggie Harding, a member of the hockey-team and a wild enthusiast.

'What are you going to do about it?' she asked anxiously.

'What do you suppose?' said Flora. 'Keep her out!'

Maggie tightened her hold.

'You can't,' she urged. 'It would be giving the game away, and the championship too. That girl's a genius at hockey. She'll be playing for her county two years from now, and for England a little later still. My dear girl, you're not going to throw away an ideal half-back, and the match with her, for the sake of a stupid quarrel like this!'

Maggie was tragical in her earnestness. Her essentially British soul was in games, and to win that particular match was at present the ambition of her life.

'If you think I'm going to humiliate myself——' Flora began.

'You must!' insisted Maggie. 'Look here—it simply comes to this: with Phyllis Caruth playing we can win; without her, we can't. You've either got to make terms with her, or give the championship away to Northcote. It's a choice of two humiliations, so take the smaller.'

Plainly, the matter was at a deadlock. Flora felt it to be so; and she felt, also, that it was by no means at an end. She knew Phyllis well enough by this time to be aware that it would be of no earthly use to try and temporize; and at the back of her mind was an unpleasant, lurking consciousness that her opponent not only 'held the ace,' but had right on her side.

A grave conclave of seniors discussed the knotty point. The end of the matter was that Phyllis Caruth was sent for, and once more desired to play hockey for Roscombe—on her own terms. 'Grudgingly and of necessity,' the boarders had capitulated.

'Do you mean,' said Phyllis slowly, her voice strangely wistful, 'that if I represent the school at hockey, I may feel that I really *do* represent it—that I belong to it as much as you?'

'Certainly,' answered the head girl coldly; 'that is, if you care——'

A new light dawned in Phyllis' eyes. No one could realize what it meant to the lonely girl to feel herself truly belonging to any community.

'You shall see whether I care or not,' she said softly, and turned away with heightened colour, glowing eyes, and quivering mouth while the others stared after her in surprise.

Maggie Harding observed:

'I knew the girl was awfully pretty, but I never knew she could look like that before.'

There was breathless excitement among the packed crowd of schoolgirls who stood around the play-field on the great day of the match. A thrill went round as the opponents stood out to 'bully' and the sticks first clashed together, and many eyes strayed beyond the forwards to where a certain half-back stood, lithe, alert, waiting her chance to run. It was but a few

minutes later that the eyes of all spectators were concentrated on her.

'Isn't she—worth it?' Maggie gasped to Flora. 'She's winning for us. Northcote can't do a thing!'

'They can now, though,' panted Flora, with a quiver of apprehension, seeing the red caps of the enemy massed around the ball.

Then a light figure flashed by her, a hockey stick struck, and the ball swept out to safety and well on towards the goal-posts. It seemed an almost impossible stroke, but Phyllis had achieved it.

'Oh, well played!' cried Maggie, ecstatically.

Raising her own stick to play—she was the hardest 'hit' in the school—she struck with all her force, and hit something—but not the ball.

'Phyl! I'm awfully sorry!' she cried in dismay. 'Oh, I say—I haven't really hurt you, have I?'

The game was suddenly suspended, the watching crowd suddenly agitated. Players came running up from all parts of the field. Phyllis Caruth was leaning against Frieda's shoulder, her face strangely white and drawn.

'Hurt, Phyllis?' Flora anxiously asked, coming up.

'Just—a little. Not to matter,' answered poor Phyllis faintly, her eyes almost closed.

'You'd better go. We'll put in a substitute,' said Flora quickly, adding to herself in a low breath, 'and lose the game.'

'No—don't—I'll play it out.' The words came jerkily, between set teeth. Phyllis looked up at Flora and her white lips forced themselves into a smile. 'I'd rather. It's nothing, really, and—we've got to win, haven't we?' she said.

With a superhuman effort she pulled herself together and went to her place, unheeding the chorus

of protests. The game continued, but she was no longer playing as she had been. Swiftly—swiftly, the score became even and there was but a few minutes more.

Maggie, playing with dogged desperation, felt the championship slipping from them, and her face was agonized. Phyllis saw that look, and summoned the last ounce of remaining strength that the torture of her knee had left her.

For the sake of the school—for the sake of the school! The field seemed rocking in a dark mist, but through it the ball showed vividly white and she flung herself after it somehow, anyhow. One had to endure, and——

One last, wild stroke, the ball swept on straight and true, and the game was won! But applause died on the watchers' lips as they saw the half-back follow her stroke blindly and fall between the goalposts in a dead faint.

The school was very quiet that evening. The championship was won for Roscombe, but there was no pæan of victory. Though the day-girls knew that theirs was a double triumph, they spoke no word on the subject.

'There's something about that kid,' remarked Flora, without looking at any one. 'You don't know how fond you are of her until——'

'Oh, shut up!' said Frieda fiercely. But her arm was round Flora's waist when they went up to the sick room an hour later to see Phyllis.

Phyllis was reading in bed, a protecting case over the injured knee. She had been taken straight to the school, and it had been thought inadvisable to move her to her home. She beamed at them as they entered.

'Oh, yes; much better, thanks,' she said quickly in reply to the obvious question. 'I'm sorry I couldn't play better, Flora, I couldn't help it. The doctor says I shan't be able to play again for weeks, but it doesn't matter, does it, now we've won. We *did* win, didn't we?'

The elder girl sat down on the bed, and took the brown hand that lay limply on the coverlet.

'Thanks to the bravest girl in the school,' she said, 'we did. And oh! by the way, Phyllis,' she added quickly, 'you're to be in the team in future. That was one of the things I wanted to say.'

Phyllis's eyes glowed with delight.

'Thank you, *awfully*,' she said, 'I didn't really do anything, only—I knew the school had *got* to win. You see'—she blushed a little—'even day-girls *do* care about the school; they're not altogether different.'

'Ye-es,' said Flora slowly; 'I think you've demonstrated *that* pretty clearly to-day.' She half turned away, and spoke without looking at either Frieda or Phyllis. 'What I wanted to say, on behalf of myself and the other boarders, was that we want all this stupid class division between boarders and day-girls to come to an end. I think we knew all the time that it was mad; but to-day we've not only found that we couldn't get on without one of the day-girls, but have seen her go through much more for the school than we ever have ourselves. And, well, when people are ready to "do and die" for the school (oh, I *am* talking like a prig!) they've a right to belong to it in every way. So, Phyllis, if you still want to join the clubs and things, why, we should be proud to have you, and the other day-girls too. Will that end the mutiny?'

'I should think it would!' cried Frieda ecstatically.

'I'm sorry there ever had to be one, Flora,' added Phyllis, 'only—only—I wanted *fair play* for every one. But it will be all right now.'

She nestled back among the pillows, and turned her head towards Frieda.

'I'm coming into school altogether now,' she said softly; 'it's done. I'm not going to be lonely any more, and it will be all right for you, too, and for all the others. It's perfect—now.'

The long, dark lashes drooped on her flushed cheek. Frieda motioned to Flora, and the two slipped softly away, leaving Phyllis to sleep.

That is why modern Roscombe is so pleasantly free from party spite and the foolish division between boarders and day-girls found in so many schools. It may also explain why, lately, when Roscombe wanted a school captain, popular with seniors and juniors alike, one whose courage was as high as her sense of justice was keen, and who would fight through thick and thin in the cause of 'fair play,' it was unanimous in electing Phyllis Caruth.

